

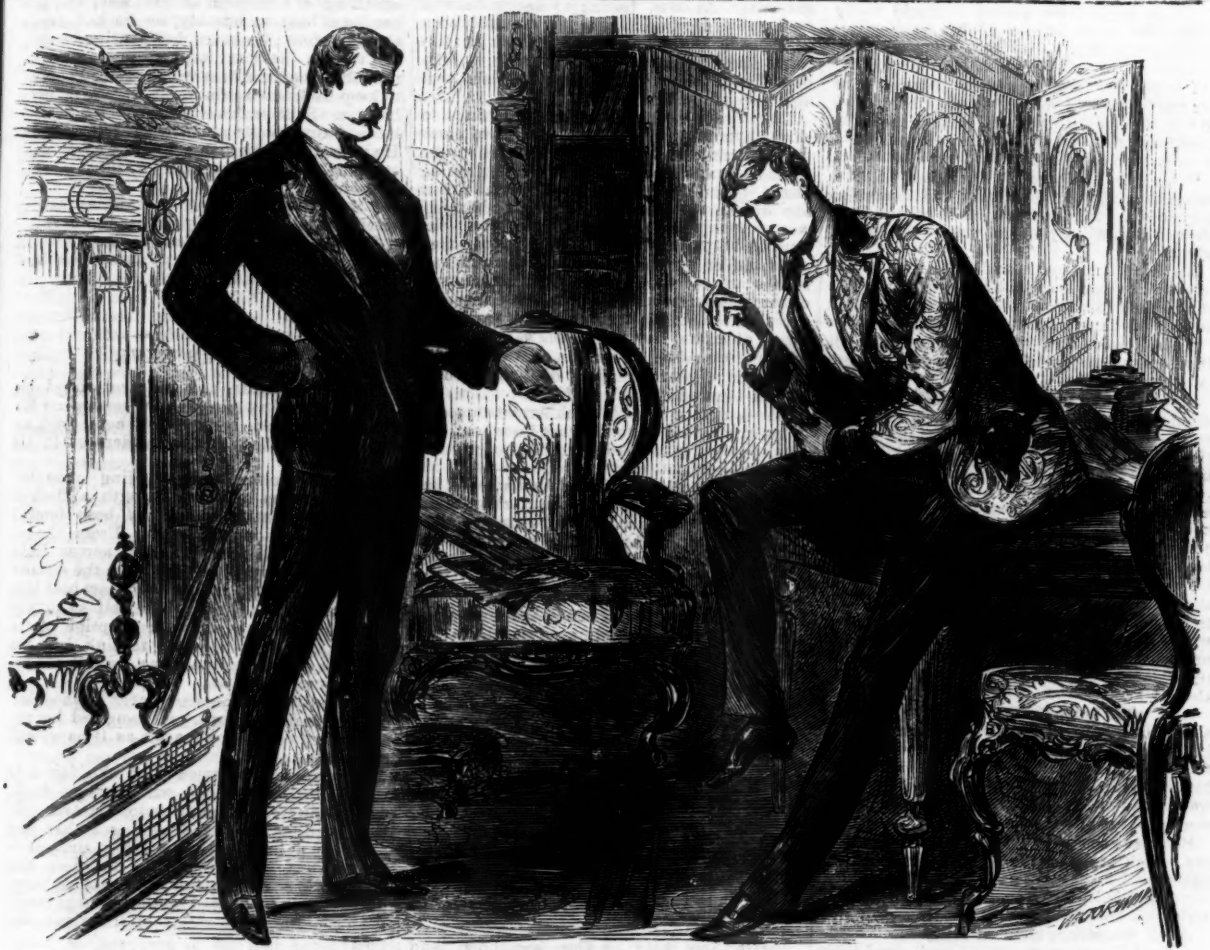
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["I WANT TO MARRY CORA," LORD FITZMAUR SAID. "I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU HAVE ANY OBJECTION TO HER BECOMING MY WIFE?"]

MORE THAN A BROTHER.

CHAPTER XXV.

"AND now, dearest," said Sir Oriel, softly, about half-an-hour before the accident, resting on his oars, as soon as he found they had one moonlit corner of the lake all to themselves, "I want you to tell me what very important thing it was that took you into the library at midnight to talk to Lord Moor-town?"

He could not see the shade which crossed Lady Gerda's face as she leant back on the cushions in the stern, her golden hair shining almost white as silver in the light of the moon, her beauty as fair to look upon as any mermaids whose smile was more dangerous to men than the fiercest storm.

"I thought you said that you would trust me?" she said, slowly.

"Yes, so I will; but I want you to trust me. Don't let us begin with any secrets from each other!" imploringly.

"But you see we have scarcely begun," with a smile. "You have not spoken to my father."

"But I have to your brother, and he says he is certain that Lord Belfield won't object to me. So good of him, when I've nothing better than a baronetcy to offer you. Such a pity that I can't make you a duchess!"

"I am quite content. Paget is a name to be proud of, and Wray Hall is perfect!"

"You think so, really?" his eyes sparkling with pleasure. "It is so awfully good of you to say so. Oh, Gerda! what will it be to have you to help me in all my plans and experiments?"

"Shall I help you? That is the question," her eyes travelling over the smooth water in search of the boat which contained a dangerous old friend.

"Of course you will. Look! there is the mouth of the tunnel. Do you think it is lowered enough?" pointing to the darkness, through which Lady Gerda's eyes could distinguish nothing. "What idiots they are! I told them especially to light it up so that you might tell me what you thought of it."

"Never mind—my advice would be worth nothing. I know nothing of waterworks, or the needs and necessities of villagers. I have lived a life of excitement, never resting, never stopping to think. Shall I ever settle down and be a Lady Bountiful?" she said, quietly, feeling as if every instinct of past or present would rise up within her to protest against such a sleepy existence.

"A Lady Bountiful!" That will be your rôle," he answered, with his ready smile. "My mother and Cora won't be far off in the Dower House, and they can look after the people."

"That I should not stand for a moment," her eyes flashing, angrily. "If I am ever mistress of Wray Hall, I will have no Miss Paget to interfere between me and my duties."

"Cora would be the last person to interfere; but she is the best-hearted girl out, and it is a real pleasure to her to go in and out amongst the cottagers with a basket of all sorts of things on her arm," he said, with some vexation in his tone.

"Ah! if they expect me to do that sort of

thing they will be disappointed. I am not fond of scraping my hat against smoky ceilings or dirtying my dresses on dusty floors. Perhaps when I am old and ugly I may take to it then—not before."

"I can't fancy you ugly—but you will look lovely with white hair!" gazing at her admiringly, and yet feeling a sense of disappointment in the depths of his heart.

"As lovely as Miss Paget with black?" she asked, mockingly.

"If it weren't too absurd I should really think you were jealous of the poor girl," flashing slightly.

"And if I were. Would it be wonderful?" her imperious temper getting the better of her prudence. "I warn you now before we go any further that you will have to make up your mind between us. You can't have both—so be so kind as to choose!"

"Haven't I chosen?" he asked after a pause, during which her heart had leapt into her mouth. "Didn't you make me the happiest of men when you said you would be my wife?"

He shipped his oars, and holding out his hands, drew her towards him, whilst he half knelt at her feet, afraid of upsetting the boat if he took his place beside her.

"Oh, Gerda! Love me as much as you can. It seems too wonderful to think you are going to be my own!"

Slowly she let her fur cloak fall from her shoulders, and took her hat off. In all her radiant beauty she sat before him, the jewels gleaming in the moonlight on the creamy whiteness of her faultless neck, her pale gold hair shining like the hair of a martyr round her well-shaped head. She knew that it was only by the spell of her beauty that she could hold this one particular lover, for in wishes and hopes and all serious ideas they were far as the poles asunder! So she let him kiss her hands, her cheeks—let him talk to her of love—that passing love with which she knew his heart was brimful at the moment, whilst her own was tortured with the thought, "Alas! for the love that loves always!"

And when she looked up she saw a boat at a little distance, and Raymond Lovell looking across the shining waters with a face as stern as death. In a minute he pulled himself together, and rowed off as if for a wager, whilst she sat still and cold, as if she were a statue of white marble.

She was aroused by the sound of a shrill cry, which startled the wild-fowl from their nests.

"What is it, for Heaven's sake?" cried Sir Oriel to a boat that was a few yards off. Allick Armstrong shouted back,—

"Lord Fitzmaur ran into Lovell, and they are all in the water!"

Then he shot off, and Sir Oriel pulled with might and main, feeling that life or death depended on his speed.

Having gained the spot where the accident happened, he stood up and tore off his coat, whilst his eyes searched eagerly for any sign of Cora.

"What are you going to do?" asked Lady Gerda, wrathlessly.

"Save her, if I can!" he answered, huskily. "And leave me?" in dismay.

"No harm will happen to you!" as he jumped in with a resounding splash.

"Cora, Cora!" he heard him cry, whilst she leant over the side of the boat vainly trying to see her brother.

"Fitzmaur, Fitzmaur!" she cried with a sob; but no one answered.

There was a crowd on the bank and a perfect Babel of voices. Torches and lanterns were moving backwards and forwards, as if the people who held them were quite bewildered. Nobody saw her—nobody heeded her. She sat there in an agony of fear, not knowing if all were drowned or all saved.

Sir Oriel had disappeared. She no longer saw his head bobbing about, sometimes clearly in the light, then indistinctly in the shadow.

He might be dead, taking with him all her hopes of rest in marriage, and Fitzmaur, the only person in the world who cared for her over-much, except Raymond. Oh! if they had all gone she prayed that she might be taken too—not left behind, without one ray of comfort or hope in the world.

A feeling of utter desolation came upon her. She felt as if she should have to sit there for ever, through the long, endless night, forgotten by everybody, in this maddening suspense. At last, feeling so desperate, she took up the oars, and though she rowed very oddly, and could not manage them in the least, she contrived to get so near to the branches of a drooping willow that she was able to catch hold of them.

They were frail and uncertain things to cling to, but by their help she drew so close to the bank that with one desperate leap she gained *terra firma*. The boat went spinning along right into the centre of the lake, but she did not disturb herself about that. It was very dark where she landed, but she stumbled along in feverish haste, over broken roots, under drooping branches, through tall rushes where the ground felt moist and clammy through her thin shoes, catching her dress on occasional brambles, and tearing it away, utterless, heedless of the valuable dress which trimmed it, on and on till she gained a little bay, where the glare of many torches fell on a crowd of anxious faces.

She could distinguish Allick Armstrong and a few others, but none of those in whom she was specially interested; and her heart stood still with fear.

Were they all drowned? As her eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, she perceived that somebody was standing close beside her, leaning against the trunk of a tree with folded arms. She could see the outline of a man's figure, but nothing more. It was not a time to care whether she was addressing a stranger or no, so she asked him if he could tell her whether all were saved.

He started, as if the mere sound of her voice had stabbed him like a knife.

"You here?" he exclaimed in a deep voice, which he recognised in an instant as Raymond Lovell's.

"Yes," she cried, as quietly as she could. "Sir Oriel threw himself into the water to save his cousin, and left me stranded in the middle of the lake. But is Fitzmaur safe?" anxiously.

"Yes. You didn't think he was the sort of man to drown, did you? They are all safe. There's nothing to be frightened about."

"Oh, thank Heaven! I was so fearfully frightened!" her lips quivering.

"Oriel got hold of Cora somehow, and dragged her to the bank; and Moortown did the same thing for Beatrice Ashley. Fitzmaur and I had none of the glory—nothing to cover our carelessness. I was fool enough to save myself," moodily; "and I wish to Heaven I hadn't!"

"Raymond!" in tender reproach, laying her hand upon his sleeve. "Good gracious! you are wet through!"

"Yes. Don't come near me. You will spoil your dress," with indescribable bitterness in his tone.

"As if I cared for my dress!"

"A thousand times more than you ever cared for me!" turning round to look her straight in the face. "Don't deny it. I saw you together in the boat!" significantly.

"Did you see me alone—deserted in a moment for his cousin?" she asked, scornfully.

"A man can scarcely stand on politeness when a girl is drowning," he replied. Though his heart was full to overflowing with the bitterness of disappointment he could not be otherwise than loyal to his friend.

"Yes! but Fitzmaur was there," biting her lip.

"Should I have left you to Fitzmaur or to anyone else?" in a low voice, which made her heart throb wildly.

Ah! how wild and reckless she felt, with Oriel cool and careless, and Raymond ready to go through fire and water for her at a word! At that moment she was ready to throw up everything—pride, fortune, comfort, and position, and cast in her lot with the penniless barrister. He had but to ask, and her newly-formed engagement would have been broken like a thread of silk—her castles in the air would have melted into mist, but Lovell was too honourable to take advantage of a moment of weakness. He saw her head bent so humbly, as he had rarely seen it before; he heard her panting breath; and though his heart leapt at the consciousness that she loved him still, he forced himself to keep back the words which were rushing to his lips. Still he felt that he could not trust himself any longer alone with Lady Gerda. He roused himself with a resolute effort, and, stepping forward, touched a man on his shoulder.

"Stand back, please!" he said, authoritatively. "And let this lady see her brother!"

Several men fell back, and the group which had been completely hidden from her anxious eyes was disclosed to view.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Sir Oriel Pount had his arm round his cousin, her small head was resting on his shoulder, his face bent close to hers, with an expression of the utmost tenderness in his eyes.

Lord Fitzmaur was standing close by, looking restless and uneasy, with a flask of brandy in his hand, which had been fetched in hot haste from the house. From the expression on his face, it flashed across Lady Gerda that he was suffering from the severest pang of jealousy, and her own heart beat high with indignation. She felt herself so utterly forgotten in the evident preoccupation of the cousins that she was ready to sink into the earth, or else to make a scene for all the bystanders to marvel at.

And although she had never wished her brother to marry Cora, yet it angered her exceedingly to see him put aside as if he were of no account.

She was so engrossed that she forgot to notice Beatrice Ashley, who, pale as death, was leaning on Lord Moortown's arm. He was bending down and talking to her very earnestly; but she was staring, straight in front of her, with despair in her deep blue eyes. Who could have imagined that her young life had just been saved by the man she loved? Who could read the riddle of these sad blue eyes?

"Your sister! I had quite forgotten!" said Sir Oriel, looking up suddenly. "I left her in my boat. Do, there's a good fellow, go and look after her. She must be tired of waiting."

"Pray do not trouble yourself about me!" Lady Gerda called out in her bell-like voice before her brother could stir. "I managed to get to shore, as no one came to fetch me; and now, finding that everyone is safe, I shall go back to the house. I don't know if Miss Paget thinks that wet clothes are conducive to health. She seems to have forgotten she is wet through!"

"Poor girl! She has had no time to think about it," Sir Oriel exclaimed, as Cora raised her head, and looked round with half-dazed eyes.

"Let me take her to the house," said Lord Fitzmaur, his voice thrilling with intense emotion. "It was all my cursed stupidity, or this never would have happened."

"Don't leave me," whispered Cora, shrinking involuntarily from the man to whom she had all but pledged herself.

"Not I, dear!" in a kindly undertone. "I think I must take her, Fitzmaur, thank you; for, to tell the truth, I don't quite know how she is to get along!"

"Which in plain English means that he intends to carry her," grumbled Lord Fitzmaur to himself; "and he couldn't do it if he tried."

"Don't let us wait another minute," said Lady Gerda, hurriedly. "I have seen enough."

Raymond Lovell followed her eagerly. Conversation was difficult so long as they were plunging through the thick underwood; but as soon as they reached a grassy path, with one long stride, he placed himself at her side. As he did so she caught her foot against an obtruding root, and he stretched out his arms to save her.

Then it was that the rage and mortification in her heart burst forth in a passion of sobs which shook her from head to foot. Raymond, understanding nothing of the cause, felt his heart rent by her emotion. Chance had made him throw his arms round her, and he could not draw them back when she seemed so much in want of his support; but he set his teeth and cursed his failing resolution, for the temptation to ask her to throw over Paget, and be his own adored wife for ever and ever, was almost too much for his strength.

"What is it? What is it? For Heaven's sake, tell me!" he entreated, as his loyal heart throbbed with intense, yet conquered longing. "Do you repent already? Do you want to get out of this marriage? Is there anything on earth that I can do for you?"

"Oh! no—no. No one can help me. I've brought myself to this by my own folly," drawing herself away from him, "and I must bear the shame alone!"

"Shame!" he echoed, in astonishment. "There is no shame in marrying Oriel Paget! There is no man in the world whom I could trust so entirely. Somebody must have been slandering him!"

"I know he's a perfect paragon," she answered, impatiently. "But does he love me? Does he care for me one straw?"

"Surely," opening his eyes to their fullest extent, "or he never would have asked you to be his wife. He has asked you—hasn't he?" he added, eagerly.

"Yes, he has asked me," slowly; "but I consider it nothing short of an insult to behave as he does with Cora Paget."

"Don't trouble yourself to be jealous of her," he said, wearily, for his short-lived hopes were dying. "He treats her just like a sister. He might just as well be jealous of Fitzmaur and you."

"Fitzmaur!" she repeated, contemptuously, angry with Lovell because he was nobly defending his friend when he might have been trying to step into his shoes, and yet knowing that he would have lowered himself in her eyes if he had acted less honourably. "It was not brotherly love that made him jump into the water like a maniac. There were plenty of other people to save her without him."

"There was no reason to suppose that Fitzmaur was drowned more than the rest. Your future husband, two girls, whom you were supposed to like, and I myself, a very old friend," his lips quivering, "were all in the water; but your brother was your first thought, and the only one you asked for."

"I could not ask for you. It would have sounded so bad," she said, in a low voice, as she gathered her cloak round her, and went on with a quicker step.

"One does not think of what sounds bad when a friend is supposed to be dying—at least, not if you care for a friend at all," he said, very coldly. "But women are born actresses, and every distinctly impulsive word is well weighed before hand."

"I came to you for comfort—and sympathy," she faltered, hurt beyond measure by his words; "and I get nothing but a lecture."

"Comfort? I've none for myself, or any one else. And as to sympathy, I haven't given it," in a deep voice.

He thought of his long years of hopeless

waiting; he thought of the little renunciation in Belfield House; he thought of the sacrifice of his mother's diamonds, which had been all in vain. His love for Gerda Staunton—what had it brought him? Nothing but pain; and yet he clung to it as a martyr would cling to the cross!

They walked on in silence, neither looking at the other. It seemed as if, in that bitter moment, each realised that their lives must be apart for the future if there were to be peace for either; and perhaps across Raymond's mind there shot a chilling doubt that his ideal was not as entirely perfect as he had fancied.

What is so disheartening as a sudden chill to a life-long faith? What so impossible to endure even with high-minded fortitude? But even if she were not perfect he asked himself, who was he that he should rise in judgment against her? Could he not love her, with all her faults, better than any other woman on earth? Yes; he could love her madly, hopelessly, but he could win her—never! And Oriel Paget, who was to carry off the prize, would never value it at half its worth. Oh, it was hard—hard as death in youth, or in the hour of success!

Lady Gerda turned to him when they came in sight of the house, but were still under the shadow of the trees.

"You are so much better than I, Raymond. It is a mercy for which you ought to thank Heaven on your knees that I can never belong to you," she said, gently.

"What seems a mercy to you is the reverse to me," gruffly; "and I don't mind telling you that I shall not be thankful for it!"

"If you knew all you would be. And here, under this lovely star-lit sky, I will make my confession. Listen, Raymond!" (Why tell him to listen whilst his eyes were fixed on her lovely face, and his ears were strained to catch every word that fell from his lips?) "Only a few days ago I was as happy as possible. Two thousand pounds were suddenly in my hands, sent to me by a fairy godmother, or somebody equally convenient. I laughed and I cried like a child. All my bills were to be paid, and I was free to remain a spinster as long as I chose."

She paused.

"Well, what then?" in feverish eagerness, his face flushing with the consciousness of his hidden secret, his heart beating fast.

"And then!" She covered her face with her hands to hide the blush of shame. "Oh, how can I say it to you. I—I lost it!"

"Did you drop your purse? Were you really carrying it all about with you?" feeling desperately annoyed, and yet acknowledging to himself that he had almost expected something worse.

"I lost it at baccarat!" she said, slowly. "Now what do you think of me? Shall you ever speak to me again?"

"As often as you will allow me," with a grave bow, "but I pity you, Lady Gerda, from the bottom of my heart. If I were Oriel," his voice throbbing with intense emotion, "I would sooner see you in your grave than know you to be a gambler!"

Without a word she turned from him, and walked slowly towards the house. When the light of the hall-lamps fell upon her face Raymond saw that it was white to the very lips.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"ORIEL, tell me quick!" and Cora's voice trembled with eagerness as she clung to his arm in the darkness of the wood, "are you engaged to Lady Gerda?"

"My dear girl, we can't wait to talk of that sort of thing now!" trying to hurry her on. "Why, five minutes ago you had almost gone to 'kingdom come!'"

"You can't humbug me. It will take no time to say 'yes!' or 'no!'" looking at him with white cheeks and flaming eyes. "Answer at once!"

"I'll do no such thing!" doggedly. "You are actually dripping, and what my mother will say to us I can't conceive. Was it Fitzmaur's fault or Lovell's?"

"I don't know, and I don't care!" stumbling on with drooping head and falling knees, feeling as if she should drop down at his side, and only supported by the strength of her will.

"My poor little Cor!" he said, tenderly, as he put his hand caressingly on the little one which was resting on his arm.

She shook it off passionately, but Sir Oriel said nothing, and walked on steadily in silence. He had enough to think of at the moment, for he felt sure that he had annoyed Lady Gerda; he knew that his mother would be seriously angry as well as very uneasy. He was doubtful whether—to put it in his own words—Fitzmaur had not been making a fool of himself at the time of the upset, and he was certain that Lord Moortown was making use of his opportunities in a way that would scandalize Miss Mackenzie, and bring down the vials of her wrath on her poor little niece's head.

As to the latter he could not prevent it or mitigate it; but with regard to Lord Fitzmaur he thought he could easily put an end to his hopes by a few words of remonstrance. He had tried it once before when the consequences were tragic, and not to be boasted of, but he thought he should succeed better now when Cora's heart was softened by having just been face to face with death.

He did not know what a tempest of passion was raging in that poor troubled heart, or how she was asking herself if the announcement of her own marriage would stop him from throwing himself away on Lady Gerda. Just as both were doubting as to what it would be best to say to the other hasty steps came crashing through the underwood, and they were joined by Lord Fitzmaur and Alick Armstrong.

"We've been looking for you everywhere," said the Earl, whose dark face was flushed with excited feeling as his eyes rested suspiciously on the couple before him, and he longed to tear Cora's hand from her cousin's arm. "I suppose we took a wrong turning, and so missed you. Are you able to walk, Miss Paget?"

Something in his tone or his manner annoyed Sir Oriel, and he answered rather shortly,—

"My cousin would die rather than be carried!"

Cora's cheeks burned, but she said nothing. She scarcely opened her lips on the way to the house; but as soon as she got there she sank down on a chair in the hall, as if quite exhausted. They all gathered round her anxiously, Sir Oriel undoing her wraps and asking for a glass of wine to be brought immediately.

The wine was drunk, Sir Oriel holding the glass to the girl's quivering lips, whilst Lord Fitzmaur stood by, nearly frantic with jealousy.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Oriel, but her ladyship's in a great way," said Mason, respectfully. "It was all that Miss Mackenzie could do to keep her from going down to the lake. Shall I go and tell Mrs. Stapley to inform her ladyship that Miss Cora has come home? It would be a relief to her mind."

"Where is my mother? In the drawing-room?"

"No, Sir Oriel; her ladyship went upstairs with Miss Ashley, because Miss Mackenzie was so upset. She wouldn't believe at first that Miss Cora was safe and well, and the doctor was sent for immediately."

"I won't see him!" said Cora, getting up wearily from her chair. "Nothing ever hurts me!" with a defiant look on her white face. "I shall be all right to-morrow."

"I only trust you will be!" said Lord Fitzmaur, fervently. "Before you go, tell me that you forgive me for my carelessness!"

"Were you careless? I don't remember,"

and she turned away, quite forgetting to utter the forgiveness he had asked for.

Sir Oriol drew her hand within his arm and walked off with her, merely saying,—

"You are not fit to walk alone. I'll see you to your room."

"I must come upstairs to change these things," said Lord Fitzmaur, following them closely, whilst Alick Armstrong nearly burst out laughing, for with a boy's keen appreciation of fun he enjoyed the situation thoroughly.

Whilst the boy laughed Mason shook his head. He did not approve of that fine lady, Lady Gerda Staunton, the fashionable London beauty, for his master, nor of Lady Gerda's brother for his young mistress. Like many men in his station, he had a sharp eye for character, and he said to himself, as he retired to his own private sanctum,—

"The happiness of the old place is doomed if those Stauntons foist themselves on the good old stock of the Pagets. It's enough to make Sir John turn in his grave!"

Sir Oriol had taken Cora to her room, interviewed his mother and the doctor, smoothed down the old maid, changed his wet things for a comfortable smoking jacket, &c., and was in the act of joining his friends in the smoking-room, when one of the footmen brought him a message from the Earl.

"Lord Fitzmaur's compliments, and he would be glad to speak to you, sir, for a few minutes in the library."

A look of annoyance crossed Sir Oriol's face.

"If it is about Cora I'll try to shut him up!" he said to himself, as he made for the library.

Lord Fitzmaur was standing on the hearth-rug, apparently absorbed in studying the elaborate carving on the high mantelpiece. But he turned round quickly as his host came in, and said, with forced composure,—

"I daresay you will guess what my important business is?"

"Is it about your sister?" asked Sir Oriol, getting out his case and offering a cigarette to his guest, but not taking a seat, except on the edge of the table.

"About Gerda? No. We settled all that this morning," looking surprised.

"But I thought she was annoyed with me to-night?"

"Very possibly. Gerda is the best girl out, but she thinks enough of herself, you know."

"She couldn't think too much. I don't believe there's a girl to compare to her in the whole world!"

"She's pretty fit!" with a smile, for all praise of his sister was welcome. "But I wanted to talk to you of your cousin. I believe you are in some sort of fashion her guardian?"

"I am her guardian by my father's will," drawing himself up gravely. "What can you want to say about Cora?"

"Only this," with a short laugh. "I want to marry her. I don't suppose you have any objection to giving her to me as my wife?" watching him keenly.

The blood rushed into Sir Oriol's face, but he kept his eyes fixed on the smoke of his cigarette, and did not answer for a minute—indeed, he felt as if he would like not to answer at all, but to kick Lord Fitzmaur out of the house. As this was impossible, he collected his thoughts as rapidly as he could; but all he said was,—

"This is rather sudden, isn't it?"

"Sudden!" exclaimed the Earl, wrathfully. "I thought I had had the patience of Job!"

"You have not seen much of my cousin, it seems to me. Surely it would be better to wait?"

"What on earth for? I'm old enough to know my own mind, I suppose, and as to my position—that won't alter. I can give my cousin a name that no one has ever been ashamed of; but as to money—we shall have enough to live on, but that's about all!"

"I don't care a straw about the money. Cora has enough of her own. But—but—she is so young—so absurdly young! Don't you think you had better come again; say in two years' time?" catching at a metaphorical straw.

"No, I don't!" bluntly. "I don't mean to be kept in a state of infernal unrest for the space of two years! Miss Paget is eighteen, I believe, and therefore quite old enough to be married."

"You can't say that. Age has nothing to do with it. She is as wild and impulsive as a child!"

"I know," with a smile that softened wondrously the ruggedness of his features. "She's not cut out of a pattern like so many other girls. That's why I like her."

"On the other hand—are you the sort of fellow to take care of her, and make her happy?" looking at him doubtfully.

Lord Fitzmaur reddened.

"I'll take as much care of her as if she were the Koh-i-Noor. And as to the rest, I'm ready to give up every habit that you good people call bad. I'll turn a saint if you'll let me have her!"

"A saint would not suit Cora; and—excuse me for saying so—a gambler wouldn't either!" flushing slightly.

"If she wishes me to give it up I will. I'll make her a first-rate husband! My father and mother will be delighted. I don't see that Lady Paget could have anything against me; so what is your objection, Paget? I believe you are a regular dog in the manger, and don't want to part with her!"

Again Sir Oriol flushed, and he bit his lip angrily.

"What infernal nonsense! You forget that I am going to be married myself."

"Yes, and bigamy is not yet legal!"

"You will let me talk it over with my mother before you speak to my cousin?" taking no notice of the former remark.

"Can't promise that, for I've already spoken."

"You have? What did she say?" breathlessly.

"I was the happiest of men, when suddenly the boat went over, and we were both in the water. If ever a man had an excuse for carelessness I had."

Sir Oriol was silent, and seemed utterly engrossed in knocking the ashes off the tip of his cigarette, whilst his face was gravity personified.

Lord Fitzmaur watched him with a certain amount of anger and amusement.

"Won't you wish me joy?" he burst out, impulsively.

"That would be premature, wouldn't it?" he said slowly. "I must think it over. You've taken me by surprise. Don't think me unkind, Fitzmaur, but you see the girl is like my own sister. I know her down to the ground; and I know," he hesitated, and looked the Earl straight in the face, "it would be so easy to make her miserable, if you didn't quite understand her!"

"Was it I or you who made her miserable that night I met her all alone on the Embankment?" Lord Fitzmaur said, quietly.

Sir Oriol sighed heavily.

"It was I. We had a tiff that morning—we often do; and yet I think she likes me as well as most people. Let us go and join the others."

Lord Fitzmaur accompanied him to the smoking-room. Everyone noticed that the Baronet was either out of spirits or terribly in love, and the talk was not as cheerful as usual; but one Earl looked as if he were about to cut his throat, and the other's eyes shone like two stars—for Love was still the lord of all!

(To be continued.)

True greatness is sovereign wisdom; we are never deceived by our virtues.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

—10—

CHAPTER III.—(continued.)

RETURNING to his rooms one night, Gervase was surprised to find his cousin, Percy Dennison, there awaiting him. They had parted on such bad terms with each other after the reading of Colonel Inglefield's will, that Gervase was at a loss to understand why his only remaining relative should have taken the trouble to unearth him.

Percy Dennison rose and held out his hand. He was a tall, slender man with regular features, long, narrow dark eyes, thin nervous lips, dark hair and moustache. A good-looking fellow, yet with something vaguely sinister and repellant about him, especially in the sidelong glance of those brilliant dark eyes.

"Are you willing to shake hands and forget that disagreeable scene at Inglefield House, Gervase?" he asked, cordially. "I am quite ready to admit that I made a fool of myself on the occasion mentioned. It seems a pity that we should remain ill friends any longer."

Percy, known to be sullen and vindictive in disposition, actually holding out the olive-branch! Gervase felt more puzzled than ever.

"You made an accusation against me then," he replied, quietly, "not lightly to be forgotten. You openly asserted that I had biased our uncle and induced him to disinherit you that the property might become mine, aware, as you must have been, that no communication of any kind had existed between us for years previous to his death!"

"You must make some allowance for disappointment," urged Percy. "The Colonel had always given me to understand that I should be his heir. But for a little escapade of mine in town which came under his notice he would not have altered his will. I am willing to retract that statement, to apologise amply for it in order to re-establish good feeling between us, old man."

It was not in Gervase Talbot's nature to nurse resentment. He accepted the proffered olive-branch, and presently the two cousins were smoking and chatting amicably.

"What are you going to do with the old place?" asked Percy Dennison.

"Let it alone for the present," said Gervase, carelessly, "until such time as I can rebuild it. It hasn't added a penny to my income, and I don't suppose it ever will."

Percy Dennison knocked the ash off his cigar thoughtfully.

"If I were to offer you six thousand down for the place, as it stands, would you accept it?" he went on, striving to divert his voice of all eagerness. "It's not a bad price, since the farms are all sold, only the house and park remaining."

Gervase stared.

The offer, coming from Percy, was as extraordinary as the olive-branch. Percy Dennison saw the look, and laughed nervously.

"Of course you are wondering how a poor devil of a briefless barrister became possessed of such a sum!" he said, coolly. "I need hardly tell you that I have got a capitalist at my back, a man to whom a few thousands more or less matters little. I was of some service to him recently, and, in return, he is willing to advance the money with which to purchase Inglefield Park. It is of no earthly use to you, Gervase, on your own admission. Do you feel like selling it?"

Gervase hesitated.

The offer was a tempting one, yet a strong reluctance to accept it, to fall in with Percy's plans so readily, overcame him. So this was why his cousin had sought him out and expressed contrition.

"What use can you make of it, pray?" he asked, coolly, "to incline you to spend six thousand pounds upon it?"

"I'm going to be married shortly to a rich widow," said Percy, unblushingly. "I was always fond of Inglefield, and I should like to

make a show place of it in readiness for my wife."

His features were calm, but the strained expectancy in his eyes rendered Gervase more inexorable, more reluctant, somehow, to gratify him, and let his property go.

"I think of doing the same thing myself some day," he replied, decisively, "and on that account I must decline to sell Ingfield now or at any other time."

No persuasions could shake this decision of his. Half an hour later Percy Dennison went away, outwardly suave and friendly, inwardly furious.

"Fool!" he muttered, between his clenched teeth; "you have refused a fair offer, you have planted yourself right in my path. Now take the consequences!"

CHAPTER IV.

GLADYS FIELDING reclined in a lounging chair by the open window, through which came the rich, heavy scent of the flowers growing in rustic boxes upon the balcony outside. A new novel, only half read, had fallen from her hand. A pug dog, with a tail curled round till it resembled a fried whiting, and a long-bodied, short legged, intelligent Dachshund lay on the ground, sharing the same white fleecy rug at her feet.

The purple velvet of the chair enhanced the perfect contour and delicate bloom of the lovely face nestled against it. The soft, wavy, golden hair piled high on the queenly head, the deep violet eyes, the proud sensitive mouth, were as irresistible as ever, while a certain tender womanliness had crept into her manner of late, adding considerably to the charm she never failed to exercise.

A picture of careless graceful ease and loveliness, she sat there with the sunbeams flecking her creamy dress, and the languid breeze caressing her fair face. One of fortune's favoured children, clever, but with no depth of sympathy or feeling, apparently, to involve suffering, such a girl might surely be content to accept the good things lavished upon her by the gods, to pluck life's roses without wounding her white fingers with their thorns.

Yet Gladys Fielding was far from feeling either happy or content. Her tranquil attitude gave no clue to the turmoil and unrest within—the fierce wrestling with the love that had well-nigh mastered every other force in her nature.

Hitherto she had allowed others to suffer through her agency, without enduring a pang herself. She had queneed it over the hearts of men, rendering them madly happy or desperately miserable while remaining calm and unmoved herself in graceful cruelty. But in Gervase Talbot's case she had not emerged soathless. She had won his heart, enthralled his senses, which she hardly knew—sometimes she feared it was only the latter; but he in turn had taught her that she was capable of loving intensely, and of suffering through love. The captive had dragged down his conqueror.

Her pride and secretly-cherished ambition to effect a brilliant alliance had influenced her solely until now. She trembled beneath love's strong, imperious grasp; it was so new and strange. Moreover, she dared not yield to it, and obey the promptings of her heart.

A marriage with Gervase Talbot would shatter her ambition, and ruin all her fair prospects of social success and triumph. Much as she loved him, she did not for a moment entertain the idea of becoming his wife. That would amount to social suicide, since he was only a poor man; and Gladys Fielding was not the woman to count all well lost for love. It must be sacrificed to ambition, and yet the effort cost her more pain than she had ever previously endured, or even deemed it possible to suffer.

During the last few weeks a star of hope had risen above her matrimonial horizon in

the shape of an elderly Scotch peer who had paid her marked attentions. Lord Roscoe owned three estates, two in Scotland, one in England; and his income was reported to be considerably over eighty thousand a year. The roots of his genealogical tree had seemingly been watered by the flood, they extended so far back! Why the wizened little man—for personally Lord Roscoe had not much to boast of—should have remained a bachelor so long society failed to elicit. Certainly it was not owing to the lack of scientific angling for such a gold fish on the part of Belgravian mothers. Thus far, however, the most tempting bait had not entered him. Then, when people had almost ceased to look upon him as a marrying man, certain significant overtures made by Lord Roscoe pointed to Gladys Fielding as the probable winner of this big prize. A more desirable *parti* from a worldly point of view could not exist. An engagement between them was already hinted at. Gladys, aware of the whispers and rumours, the envy to which the conquest had given rise, felt inwardly elated, full of restless anticipation, yet her triumph was far from being perfect of its kind.

Should Lord Roscoe propose to her she intended to accept him, to become a peeress, looking beyond the man himself, for whom she cared nothing, to the wealth and rank, the proud position, he could offer her. It was her recently awakened love for Gervase Talbot, and the necessity that must soon arise for putting it from her, that embittered both present and future.

"If they could only change places," she reflected, wistfully. "If Gervase were only as rich as Lord Roscoe, how perfect life might be made!"

To-morrow Mrs. Fielding and her daughter were to leave town for the seaside. Lord Roscoe, having ascertained their destination to be Folkstone announced his intention of spending several weeks at the Pavilion; another proof of his complete enthrallment.

"The ridiculous little creature will screw his courage up to the proposing point at the seaside I daresay," thought Gladys, "and I shall have to spend the remainder of my natural existence in his society. How shall I bear it, loving Gervase so intensely? And yet it is what I have wished and longed for! Now it seems horrible in the extreme. I wonder what Gervase will say or do when he hears of my engagement? Poor boy, I am sorry for him, and sorry for myself. He said he would call this afternoon; he knows it is our last day in town, and I have denied myself to everyone else on his account. I must see him once more. What can be keeping him away? If—"

"Mr. Talbot!" announced the footman.

"I knew you would come!" she said, in low caressing terms, extending a white-jewelled hand to him, "just to take leave of us. Mamma is upstairs superintending the packing. She will be down presently."

Gervase Talbot seated himself beside her, a wan, haggard look resting upon his handsome young face, which even her pleasant greeting could not chase away.

Gladys wondered what it meant. She feared an open declaration of love from him, a passionate appeal, even while she longed for it. With Lord Roscoe in the background it must needs prove embarrassing and futile. Yet to learn from the artist's lips how well he loved her would be passing sweet, although a long farewell, perhaps bitter reproachful words, came close behind the declaration. The gracious memory of it would be hers to treasure in the years to come.

"I heard a rumour to-day, coupling your name with that of Lord Roscoe," he began, abruptly. "Surely there is no truth in it?"

So she was in for what she had dreaded—a scene. But Gladys Fielding never lacked self command. She raised her eyes to the artist's face as if his unwonted roughness had astonished her.

"Mr. Talbot!"

"Miss Fielding, Gladys," he went on. "You know, you must know, what this means to me. Is it possible that—that you contemplate marrying Roscoe?"

Since the peer had not proposed to her yet Gladys saw a door of escape.

"How absurd you are!" she said gently. "There is nothing between Lord Roscoe and myself—absolutely nothing—at the present moment. You will accuse me next of wanting to marry Tom Thumb! His lordship has paid me some little attention, it is true; but then so have many other men, and yet I am not engaged to them—or likely to be."

Gervase Talbot's brow cleared. It never occurred to him that she could be guilty of deceit or prevarication. Gladys Fielding's power over him would have been less had he succeeded in reading her selfish, unprincipled nature aright. He imagined that such a beautiful form must contain an equally beautiful soul—a little warped by the world's evil influences and contact, perhaps, but still a soul deserving of a man's best love and devotion.

"You have given me such unspeakable relief," he exclaimed, pushing the short, crisp waves of red-gold hair back from his broad white forehead. "It would have driven me mad to think of you as Roscoe's promised wife. Gladys, I can remain silent no longer with regard to my own love for you. I seem to have been under a spell from the first day of our acquaintance. I saw you, and straightway a new existence opened out before me. I knew what glorious possibilities life might hold under certain conditions. You were gracious to me, otherwise the dream of bliss would have faded out in sheer hopelessness. Gladys, my queen, my peerless darling, you are more to me than life—than art! I have no longer any object in living, save to love you. Perhaps I had far better have left all this unspoken, and yet surely you must know?"

She had known for many weeks. In a moment of pique she had resolved to make him her bond-slave, to overcome his apparent indifference to her, intending to dismiss him as she had dismissed other men when their homage became tiresome.

But this time she had been caught in her own trap. Gervase was at her feet, yet in turn she was hopelessly in love with him—she, who had deemed herself to be beyond the reach of such contagion; and this confession of love emanating from him was the most welcome to which she had ever listened, since her heart responded to it.

She raised her eyes and permitted them to meet his. Something in their shining depths gave him courage to proceed.

"If we had but met sooner," he said, in a tone of passionate regret. "As it is, if you love me, Gladys, if you are brave and true, darling, we may yet be happy!"

Her eyes drooped beneath their full white lids. His fervour, his strong, rugged wooing terrified while it delighted her. She knew they were treading upon dangerous ground now, and it behoved her especially to be cautious.

"Gladys," he resumed, kneeling beside her, his handsome, pleading face lighted up by the golden afternoon effulgence; "say that you love me, that you would grieve if I went away from you to-day, and never permitted myself to see you again?"

What dim, unconscious foreboding, what premonition of evil brought those prophetic words to his lips? Many of us have at some time uttered similar ones, as if a dark cloud in the immediate future were permitted to cast its shadow over us in advance.

"I—I think I should care a little," faltered Gladys, offering no resistance as he took her hands in his, and rained kisses upon them.

"And you will be my wife when—I am in a position to claim you as I must, as I will become day?" he cried, defiantly, in the tone of a desperate man throwing down the glove to Fate, daring it to do its worst in the attempt to wrest the coveted prize from him.

"I can make no promises of any kind," she replied. "If I were to do so mamma would refuse to endorse them. Don't be unreasonable, Gervase. I have conceded more to you than to any other man living, and yet you are not satisfied."

"Darling you shall not reproach me again on that score. The mere knowledge of your love has rendered me rich, content, beyond measure," he said, earnestly. "If I am only a poor man now I will work hard to obtain fame and fortune that I may win you. Until then I will demand no promise from you, confident that you will remain loyal to yourself and me."

She smiled sadly. That he should deem her capable of waiting until he had amassed a fortune by painting seemed so far-fetched. Why, in all probability, he would never succeed in so doing. Yet she would not mar the harmony of this one love-scene between them by throwing cold water upon his glowing schemes. She wanted it to be perfect—while it lasted.

"Let us be happy while we can, dear!" she said, as he folded her in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers, "and leave the future to take care of itself. Oh, Gervase!" losing sight of caution for a brief moment, "I love you—I love you! and the world is very hard and cruel! I wonder if you will always care as much for me as you do now?"

"Why should you doubt the lasting nature of my love?" he asked, not without an uneasy pang of reproach, a keen sense of dishonour, as his thoughts reverted unwillingly to Madeline Vernon, waiting for him so patiently, poor child, at Inglefield!

"For love is like the restless waves,
Ever at rise and fall;
The only love a woman craves
It must be all in all."

As these words, the refrain of a fashionable song, floated in through the open window from the next house, where a young girl sat singing, Gladys Fielding glanced up meaningfully at her companion.

"They are very *apropos*," she murmured, "very!"

"You will never be less dear to me than you are at this moment, Gladys!" he said, emphatically, bending over her as he spoke. "You have bewitched me, in fact; and I must for ever remain under the spell! For your sake I have sacrificed even more than you are aware of—more than even I care to reveal!"

"What do you mean?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Never mind; I am not free to explain. Only be faithful, Gladys, now and always in return!"

"We understand each other," she said, gently, "and that is enough, Gervase! I think I can hear mamma coming!"

"Give me something to remember this interview by," he pleaded. "Not that I am in any danger of forgetting it, but as a *souvenir*!"

She took a flower, a tea-rose, from the cluster at her throat, and gave it to him.

When Mrs. Fielding entered the drawing-room she had recovered her usual *aplomb*, and talked with all her wonted grace and vivacity until her visitor departed.

Gervase Talbot went home with his mind in a state of chaos, revolving various schemes for the speedy realization of an immense fortune at one moment, a fortune that would enable him to marry Gladys Fielding, bitterly conscious the next of the dishonourable part he had been tempted to play—of his infidelity towards Madeline Vernon!

Through all his mad infatuation for Gladys ran a strain of regret for the purer, nobler love once entertained for the gentle girl at "*Mon Repos*!"

The latter had filled him with tender, exalted aspirations; it had nerved him with fresh strength for the battle of life. His passion for Gladys Fielding was full of feverish, restless elements that reduced him to a lower

level, rendering him jealous and miserable when not in her society, disinclined for steady work, a prey to vague regrets and desperate longings.

In the solitude of his own room he thought the matter out, and resolved to write to Madeline, acquainting her of all that had occurred to influence him since their parting, admitting his dereliction, and throwing himself upon her mercy. With all a man's selfishness, he would allow the ultimate decision to rest with her, thus avoiding the onus of it.

To marry her, now that his sentiments had undergone such a radical change without any explanation or admission, would, he argued, be cruelly wrong and unjust. She must know all. Then, if she still wished to become his wife in the face of such knowledge, he would keep his word to her at any cost, and forego Gladys Fielding. At least this shred of honourable feeling remained to him. The contingency was a very remote one, however. Madeline Vernon was the last girl in the world to retain a lover against his will. She would be certain to restore his freedom.

The letter was written, how Gervase never exactly knew. His head felt strangely confused, and the right sentences refused to form themselves, and flow from his pen. As much as possible he strove to soften the cruel, shameful tidings it contained, oppressed all the while by a miserable sense of his own baseness in sending it. The letter written at length, he went out himself to post it.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he dropped it into the box of a branch office at Chelsea, not far from the street where he lodged—a shop and post-office combined. Some repairs were in progress at the time connected with the post-office department. The woodwork around the receiving box was being renewed. That fateful letter slipped between the wall and the woodwork instead of going into the proper receptacle, and it lay there *perdu*. Millions of letters are safely delivered; that especial letter was fated to go wrong, and who should dare to call it chance? Madeline Vernon was not to receive it on the following morning.

His errand accomplished, as he thought, Gervase Talbot turned in the direction of the river. It was quiet and still there, and his head ached horribly. The light breeze might allay the unwonted pain. He could do no more until he had received Madeline's reply. Poor Madeline! He had thrown her over for Gladys Fielding, and at that moment Gladys was dancing with Lord Roscoe, doing all that a proud, graceful, high-bred woman could do to complete her conquest and secure the part of the season.

Midnight, and the stars shone down brightly upon the sleeping earth, their glory reflected in the abiding river. But Gervase had not returned to his rooms; neither was he destined to do so again, and the river knew how to keep its own secrets!

CHAPTER V.

THE fact was obvious. Gervase Talbot had disappeared completely, and mysteriously, leaving no clue by which he might be traced, and his fate ascertained.

Gervase was the happy possessor of a latch-key. He could come or go as he pleased, without exciting comment or notice. Consequently his landlady, a well-educated refined widow, in no wise resembling the vulgar h-less landlady of popular fiction, failed to remark his non-return that night from his stroll by the riverside. It was only the next morning when she ascertained his absence, and found that his bed had not been slept in, that she felt vaguely uneasy.

What could have occurred to keep him from home all night? For a young man his habits were tolerably regular. If absent to absent himself for a short time he had always

notified his intention previously to Mrs. Sears, his landlady. Had he met with an accident?

The day went slowly by, yet Gervase did not put in an appearance, and Mrs. Sears' anxiety on his account grew stronger. The artist's sunny, genial nature had won her liking, and the fear lest some evil had befallen him oppressed her greatly. She sent round to make inquiries at the club he frequented, but he had not been seen there, and she knew of no relations to whom to apply. In fact, the poor fellow had but one still existing—his cousin, Percy Dennison.

When the second day drew to a close without bringing any news of Gervase Talbot, Mrs. Sears became convinced that some calamity had overtaken her favourite lodger. Otherwise he would ere now have returned or communicated with her. Under the circumstances she felt justified in opening some of the letters left scattered about on his table, in the hope of obtaining useful information bearing upon the strange disappearance.

But she was disappointed. Gervase Talbot's correspondence proved to be of the most ordinary description, relating chiefly to matters connected with his profession. It threw no light upon his absence, and Madeline's letters to him were all safely looked up in his desk.

A note written by Percy Dennison to his cousin, making an appointment to dine together at the former's club, dated three weeks ago, helped her a little, however. Since they were relations Mr. Dennison would be the proper person to apply to with regard to the artist's disappearance. Mrs. Sears accordingly lost no time in going to the address mentioned in the note, and making her statement.

Percy Dennison listened to it rather unconcernedly at first. He was inclined to think her fears exaggerated and unnecessary. Gervase was certain to turn up all right in a day or two, he said, lightly, and he would feel annoyed if any publicity were given meantime to his absence.

Yet he promised to make some inquiries respecting his cousin's whereabouts, and to call at his lodgings next day to ascertain if he had returned.

Since their reconciliation, and Percy Dennison's unsuccessful bid for Inglefield Park, the cousins had frequently met. The barrister had followed up his friendly overtures by affecting Gervase Talbot's society to an extent unknown even in the days preceeding their quarrel.

He seemed anxious to be on the best possible terms with the artist, especially when other men were present. The latter's refusal to sell Inglefield House and Park at any price had, apparently, failed to annoy or disconcert him.

Percy Dennison looked somewhat grave when Mrs. Sears informed him upon the following day that Gervase was still missing. He told her that he had been unable to elicit any information himself, although he had made careful inquiries.

An air of deeper concern pervaded the barrister's manner, as if, against his will, he had been compelled to admit the serious nature of the disappearance.

He asked a great many questions with regard to Gervase Talbot's everyday habits, haunts, and acquaintances; he went through his rooms, which still seemed to retain the individuality of their absent owner. His books, his pipes, his pictures, were so many mute reminders of the handsome young fellow, around whose fate hung a veil of mystery.

Percy Dennison glanced at a few of his cousin's letters in Mrs. Sears's presence; but failing, as she had previously done, to elicit any information from them, suggested the advisability of communicating with the police—quietly at first, more openly afterwards, should need arise.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Sears would kindly take charge of Gervase Talbot's effects. The police were communicated with, and an accurate

description of the missing man issued, but no result came of it. Then, feeling the affair could no longer be kept secret, Percy offered a reward of fifty pounds, and that also failed to bring him to the surface.

Paragraphs appeared in the daily papers commenting upon the strange and regrettable disappearance of that promising young artist, Mr. Gervase Talbot. All sorts of surmises and conjectures bearing upon it were floated. Society made it a nine days' wonder. That he had met with foul play of some kind was the prevailing opinion.

Gladys Fielding, now at Folkestone with Lord Roscoe dancing attendance upon her, searched the papers daily in a state of feverish anxiety for fresh news regarding the man she loved.

His unsolved fate affected her deeply, selfish and calculating as she was. What could have happened to him so soon after their parting? At least, she had said or done nothing then to drive him to despair; she had been yielding and gracious, reluctant to tell him the cruel, bare truth that she could never become his wife, and the reflection gave her some comfort. What if they were never fated to meet again?

She shuddered as she contemplated the bitter possibility, and the suspense respecting his fate gave her sleepless nights and sorrowful days. Yet still the Roscoes went on as usual. She could not afford to throw away her splendid prospects for a dozen missing lovers, or neglect the substance for the shadow.

Madeline Vernon suffered most in the matter, simply because her love for Gervase Talbot was so pure and deep, unadulterated by any baser elements.

Percy Dennison, aware of his cousin's engagement (Gervase had himself alluded to it) went down to Inglesfield in person to break the news of his disappearance to Madeline. It was hardly a pleasant task.

Madeline did not cry or faint upon learning what had happened; she only turned very pale, regarding him as he sat opposite to her with eyes clear, steady gaze of which seemed striving to read his inmost soul.

"You were not on friendly terms with each other, I believe, previous to Gervase's disappearance, Mr. Dennison?" she said, interrogatively. "You had fallen out respecting family matters?"

"Oh, we had made that up; he and I were the best of friends!" rejoined Percy, hastily, looking beyond rather than at her. "We both saw the folly of remaining at daggers drawn. It is a great consolation to me now to reflect that there was no ill-feeling between us. Poor, dear old fellow; he was always the soul of good-nature!"

"You speak of Gervase in the past tense," said Madeline, clasping her small white hands unconsciously. "Mr. Dennison, you do not, you cannot think that he is dead?"

The wail of despair in her voice smote upon his heart, and haunted him for weeks to come. He shifted his position nervously.

"My dear young lady," he replied, after a brief silence, full of meaning. "I hope sincerely that he may yet turn up all right. But if Gervase were alive and well, what motive could he have in thus effacing himself? Would he allow you, for instance, to remain in suspense respecting his safety?"

This was unanswerable, and Madeline's agony of fear and sorrow deepened. She had never liked Percy Dennison. She had always distrusted him, yet it seemed impossible to connect him with her lover's disappearance; and in this great misery that had come upon her, she looked to him for aid and advice, since he was Gervase Talbot's cousin!

"You think he met with foul play that night?" she murmured.

"I am afraid so," said Percy, gravely. "I have set the police to work, and spared no efforts in the attempt to unravel the mystery—or the crime—as it may be. It is a painful subject to allude to, but I have been more than once to various mortuaries around Lon-

don, to view the bodies of men found drowned since Gervase disappeared; but to no purpose."

Madeline shuddered; it seemed too fearful. That sunny, handsome face, those eloquent grey eyes quenched in death—cruel, violent, untimely death—the river ooze and tangle matting the red-gold hair. Oh, it was too horrible! As she thought of it, a short, sharp cry of anguish rose to her lips.

"Can nothing else be done?" she demanded. "Oh, how am I ever to bear the suspense? It is intolerable!"

"I am straining every nerve already to bring his fate to light," was the reply. "Should anything transpire I will communicate with you at once."

Before going back to town Percy Dennison went over Inglesfield House, accompanied by the caretaker, with the air of one surveying his own property. Gervase had left no will, and should he fail to return, Percy, as his only relative, would enjoy the reversion of the estate. In the park the barrister was joined by a short, stout man, with shrewd light eyes, a quantity of appendages dangling from his watch-chain, and a massive signet-ring on the little finger of each dumpy hand. The two had journeyed down from town together, Percy Dennison's companion keeping himself in the background during that visit paid to Madeline Vernon at "Mon Repos." He had declined to go to Inglesfield House, which seemed to possess no interest for him; but the wild, neglected park, where nothing grew well or luxuriantly because the soil was so poor and rocky, claimed the dumpy man's fullest attention.

He wandered about it with Percy Dennison, every now and then grubbing among earth and stones and bushes, as if he more than half expected to find some buried treasure, talking earnestly to his companion the while. He took a sample of the barren soil away with him in a small wooden box, a satisfied gleam in his light eyes, and the two men went back to town as first-class passengers, smoking expensive cigars, and arranging a plan of action to be carried out in the immediate future, that should ensure them both a fortune.

Another month went by, and Gervase Talbot was still missing.

Percy Dennison's conduct could hardly have been more straightforward and honourable—on the surface. He expressed himself willing to take charge of all his cousin's personal effects pending his very unlikely return.

He paid one or two small debts the artist had contracted, and settled all outstanding accounts with Mrs. Sears, previous to removing the poor fellow's possessions, including several unsold pictures and countless sketches, which had now gone up considerably in value, since it was most improbable that Gervase Talbot would ever produce any more.

Among the pictures was that of Helen and her maidens; and Percy Dennison took special care of that. In Helen's lovely face he had recognised the features of Gladys Fielding.

Perhaps, later on, when she had become Lady Roscoe and enormously wealthy, she might feel inclined to give a large sum for it; and he was encouraged in this idea by the suspicion that some love-passages had transpired between the artist and his beautiful sister, notwithstanding the former's engagement to Madeline Vernon.

Such a remarkably shrewd, far-seeing young man could hardly fail to make his way in the world; sooner or later. His next move was to take possession of Inglesfield Park in his cousin's name; and to assert his right, as next of kin to administer the estate until such time as definite tidings of Gervase Talbot's fate could be elicited.

There was no one to contest the point, since the family lawyer offered no opposition, and Inglesfield Park was deemed practically worthless, shorn as it had been of the large farms and hundreds of acres pertaining to it.

Percy Dennison came down and took up his abode in the big, ruinous mansion, and his short, stout friend was frequently with him.

Sometimes the two went out rabbit-shooting, or a deer was killed to replenish the larder at small cost.

Percy's objection to spend money unprofitably was already rendering him unpopular throughout the village. A more careful, self-appointed trustee could hardly have been found.

And Madeline Vernon?

She suffered in silence, but the suspense, the terror that never left her by day or night—for even her dreams were always of Gervase and the cruel mystery overhanging his fate—had a visible effect upon her.

To know the worst respecting him would have been a relief from that long, strained agony of suspense, and vague, terrible conjecture.

That he still loved she hardly dared to hope. In that case would he not, under any circumstances, have communicated with her? Yet the uncertainty tended to keep hope alive within her heart, although it involved ever-recurring pain and disappointment.

Madeline's step grew languid and slow. There were dark lines beneath her eyes; the pure, sweet, wistful face became thin and pallid. Slowly but surely the torture of waiting, the pitiless mystery enshrouding her lover's disappearance, the blank, utter silence, were robbing her of health and strength.

She could think of no motive which might have induced him thus strangely to absent himself. He was not in pecuniary straits; he was making good headway in his profession. The non-delivery of that important letter had kept her in ignorance of his infidelity.

That his love for her had ever wavered or been superseded did not occur to her at all. Madeline would have deemed that simply impossible. She thought of it as corresponding with her own, which was boundless, unfathomable, incapable of change. The faithfulness of the man she loved and trusted would have hurt her even more than his loss had she been aware of it.

Up to the time of his disappearance Gervase Talbot had written to her regularly; he had not fallen off in that respect. Perhaps, towards the last, his letters had grown shorter, and as if they were written with an effort. Overwork and cares connected with his profession might account for this, however. Madeline was not likely to ascribe any other cause or to suspect one.

No, she felt convinced that his absence or death was the result of foul play; and she racked her brain in conjectures and surmises as to the exact nature of the crime committed.

What enemies could Gervase, with his genial, open, sunny disposition, have contracted? Who could have an interest in depriving him of life or liberty?

Madeline, well acquainted with all the details in reference to his disappearance, found it hard to connect Percy Dennison with that event.

The cousins had not, according to Percy's account, seen each other for several days previous to it; all enmity between them was at an end. Alone, unaccompanied, Gervase had gone out to meet his doom.

She did not like Percy; at the same time her sense of justice made her shrink from suspecting him without due cause, while that old lingering prejudice and distrust which had once induced her to warn Gervase against his cousin still survived in spite of justice and reason being against it. A woman's unerring instinct is after all her strong point, not her cool, logical reasoning faculties, with which, as a rule, she is not overburdened.

To add to Madeline's trouble and perplexity the aunt with whom she lived—a little old lady with a complication of ailments—died somewhat suddenly, leaving her quite alone.

She had not been a very affectionate or lovable old lady, her attention having been concentrated chiefly upon the aforesaid ailments, of which, in time, she had become almost proud. Yet she had given the girl a home. Now Madeline would have to earn

her own living, her aunt's small annuity dying with her.

Only the furniture and the bits of old-fashioned plate reverted to Madeline. Even these must be sold to defray the funeral expenses, the little old lady having insisted upon four mourning coaches, the grand funeral hearse from Peterboro', and a bricked grave, that being the next thing, in her opinion, to the dignity of a family vault.

"I'm sure I couldn't rest in a grave that was not bricked, Madeline," she had observed, pathetically, an hour or so previous to her death. "We have always done things properly in our family at such times, my dear, regardless of expense, and I trust to you to see my wishes carefully carried out."

Madeline obeyed to the letter in her desire to fulfil the poor old auntie's last and rather selfish request. When all the bills had been paid a surplus of ten pounds remained. Madeline felt that she must lose no time in obtaining a suitable situation.

CHAPTER VI.

"My dear, what plans have you formed for the future, or have you thought about it yet at all?"

It was the Vicar's wife who put this question to Madeline. She had invited the girl to spend a few days at the comfortable Vicarage, away from the gloom and desolation of "*Mon Repos*."

Mrs. Astley was a brisk, kind-hearted, helpful little woman, not a priestess who went about the parish enjoying a kind of reflected clerical lustre, convincing other people of their shortcomings by means of her severe disapproving air. Everyone liked Mrs. Astley, and accepted her friendly and acceptable ministrations in good part. Knowing what she did of Madeline's premature sorrows and anxieties, the Vicar's wife felt a great deal of sympathy for her. Better still, she was prepared to help the girl.

"I must prevail upon someone to engage me as their companion or governess," said Madeline, in reply. "My French and music are good, and I could teach elementary mathematics if required. I should prefer acting as companion, though; the duties would be less fatiguing."

"Should Mr. Talbot ever return," the little lady went on, "your engagement to him would hold good, rendering it unnecessary for you to earn your own living. In that case, child, you should come and stay with me till your marriage took place."

A faint colour tinged the creamy pallor of Madeline's sensitive young face. The sorrow in her liquid dark eyes caused Mrs. Astley's kind heart to ache as she beheld it.

"It is so unlikely, dear Mrs. Astley," she said, with a sob. "If Gervase were still living he would have found means to tell me so. He loved me far too well to give me any needless suffering or anxiety on his account. And yet I cannot think of him as dead—even in my dreams. Is it not strange? He comes to me amidst confused, unfamiliar surroundings, and under varying circumstances, but always as he looked in life, with the old glad smile. Not once has sleep pictured him to me as lying dead at the bottom of that cruel river."

"We must wait and pray, even if the answer is long deferred," replied the Vicar's wife, gently. "To return to your immediate affairs, Madeline. Have you no relations, however distant, now that your aunt is gone?"

"I have an uncle—my father's brother," she replied. "He quarrelled with his family many years ago, and went to America, where, I believe, he made a large fortune. I daresay he is dead now; and even if he were alive, and I knew where to find him, I should hardly like to solicit aid. I would much rather earn my own living."

"I know a lady in town, a Mrs. Falconer,

who is wishing to meet with a nice companion," said Madeline's friend, thoughtfully. "She wrote to me only the other day regretting her inability to find one that suited her. I am sure she would like you, Madeline, my dear, and you would find her by no means difficult to get on with. She is a wealthy widow, occupying a good position in society. Your duties with her would be very light ones."

"Oh, Mrs. Astley, will you write to this lady for me at once, or give me her address in town that I may apply to her?" exclaimed the girl, roused to display far more interest than she had done of late. "It is precisely what I want, and unless we are prompt the situation will be gone."

"Very well!" said Mrs. Astley, smiling at her eagerness. "I will write by the next post. The fact of your being so well known to me will serve as sufficient reference. Should Mrs. Falconer have engaged a companion I daresay we could find other employment for you, since you are so desirous of running away from Inglesfield to begin the battle of life on your own account."

But Mrs. Falconer was still companionless, and her friend's description of Madeline Vernon happening to please her, and arouse her interest, she wrote in reply, requesting the girl to come to her for a month or so, that her competency might be ascertained, ere she was formally engaged.

Madeline gladly complied. She wanted to get away from Inglesfield, and its now painful associations. The mere sight of Percy Dennison, the knowledge that he was installed at Inglesfield House in Gervase Talbot's stead, never failed to give her acute pain. Employment, fresh scenes and associations would leave her less time for brooding over the one great sorrow that had marred her life.

The whole affair was so expeditiously arranged that, three weeks from the date of her aunt's death, Madeline had said good-bye to Inglesfield, and was on her way to London.

Gervase Talbot had disappeared in London; the great, mysterious, teeming city had swallowed him up. Although she hardly ventured to admit it to herself, Madeline felt drawn towards London by reason of what had happened there to her lover, and a desperate hope that it might some day restore him to her.

Mrs. Falconer proved to be a gifted, highly cultivated gentlewoman, whose delicate health prevented her from going much into society, and who for that reason required a somewhat exceptional companion to enliven the monotony of her enforced seclusion.

She treated those dependent upon her with unvarying kindness and consideration. Madeline, entering the pretty drawing-room for the first time, with palpitating heart, to receive a gentle friendly welcome from the invalid that set her completely at ease, felt that she had everything to hope and nothing to fear from her new employer.

"I think we shall get on nicely together," said the widow, in her low, musical voice, glancing appreciatively at the tall, graceful girl sitting beside her sofa. "At least, I hope so. It is my desire that all around me should feel happy and at home in their respective capacities. You will have no lapdog to comb, or parrots to feed, Miss Vernon, since I do not possess either. I shall require you to read to me occasionally, to write my letters, to go out in the carriage with me, and so on."

Madeline, as she listened and then made some reply, thought these "duties" might well be termed pleasures as compared with the constant nursing, the large share of actual housework, she had been accustomed to during her aunt's lifetime.

"Mrs. Astley mentions in her letter," the widow resumed, "that you have recently suffered a double bereavement of a very painful nature. Now I want you to regard me as your friend as well as your employer, to come to me when you are feeling sad and lonely,

and let me give you what help and comfort I can."

With a sense of gratitude and thankfulness of being safely anchored in a peaceful, pleasant haven, Madeline bent forward impulsively and kissed the sweet, high-bred face glancing up into hers with such a kind, penetrating expression.

"You cannot tell how glad I am to be here," she said, earnestly. "Dear Mrs. Falconer, in return for your kindness and sympathy I will do my utmost to please and satisfy you—I will indeed!"

Save for the sorrow that never left her in connection with Gervase Talbot, Madeline would have been happy and at ease in her new home.

Mrs. Falconer's friendly, considerate attitude towards her never varied. That lady's bodily ailments and weak health had not resulted in souring her temper. Pain never rendered her peevish or unreasonable towards her young companion, and ere long the two women became closely attached to each other.

Madeline's new duties were light and pleasant, while the cultured society she enjoyed as Mrs. Falconer's companion served to impart finish and *aplomb* to her manner—to give her that undefinable tone which her secluded country life had rendered necessary.

One day Mrs. Falconer drew from Madeline the whole history of her engagement to Gervase Talbot, and his subsequent disappearance.

"I read of it at the time," she said, "thoughtfully. The papers frequently alluded to Mr. Talbot's strange, inexplicable absence. I little knew then how dear and necessary his *fiancée* would eventually become to me. Have you no hypothesis of your own, Madeline, to account for this total effacement of your lover?"

"He must have met with foul play," was the reply, uttered with a sorrow too deep to admit of the luxury of tears. "Perhaps, for the sake of his watch or his purse they took his life, that life so full of promise, dearer, far dearer, to me than my own. Oh? Mrs. Falconer, if you could but have seen Gervase—the photographs fail to do him credit. Everyone said how handsome he was, how clever and noble! It made me proud to think that he was my lover, and now—"

She broke down, hiding her face in the cushions of the invalid's sofa.

"My poor child," said Mrs. Falconer, gently, passing her thin hand with caressing touch across the girl's dark hair. "You must not give way to despair. Remember, this is but conjecture on your part. Mr. Talbot may yet return alive, and able to explain this strange absence, although I admit it is most unlikely. Still the chance exists. You had not fallen out with each other after the fashion of lovers about some trifle?"

"No, oh, no! Gervase and I never quarrelled, never by any chance."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had," reflected the widow, a believer in the old adage that the course of true love never did or should run smoothly, obstacles and hindrances serving to give the necessary impetus to it. Yet she refrained from uttering her thought aloud.

She called to mind a rumour heard some time previous, coupling Gervase Talbot's name with that of Gladys Fielding, the recognized beauty, hinting broadly at his evident devotion to her. Could there have been any foundation for it? she wondered. Had Gladys Fielding, whom she knew and disliked, played with the young artist, divorced him from his allegiance to Madeline, and then cast him aside unceremoniously, to end his life by his own hand as the result of her cruelty?

(To be continued.)

TEARS are the softening showers which cause the seed of heaven to spring up in the human heart.

SWEET MEMORIES.

—0—

WHEN winter hurls her bitter aleet
Across the unprotected moor,
The traveller with hasty feet
Speeds on toward his cabin door;
But though the sharp-fanged, nipping air
May crust his beard with icy rime,
It cannot from his memory tear
The sweet delights of summer-time.

So every memory born of joy
Will live as long as life shall last!
No changes can the charm destroy—
'Tis proof 'gainst every arrow cast.
A backward view recalls the hours
That once our youthful pulses thrilled,
As aromatic summer flowers
Live in the scents from them distilled.

The memory of a childhood passed
Beneath a gentle mother's sway,
With love's sweet mantle o'er it cast,
Can never wholly pass away.
What ever adult fate we earn,
Whatever the censure or the praise;
Still will the fond heart sometimes turn
Back to those careless, happy days.

Then let us, as we journey on,
Endeavour some sad heart to cheer—
'Twill be an act to think upon
When ending our probation here—
A joy to know that after death
Has set the restless spirit free,
There still lives in our mortal breath
Some fondly cherished memory.

F. S. S.

THE MYSTERIES OF FERNLEA.

—0:—

CHAPTER IX.

It would have astonished worthy Mr. Gray considerably, and even the astute detective not a little, could they have taken an instantaneous trip across the Channel and visited a private sitting-room in a quiet but well-known hotel near the Champs Elysées. There, in one of the low arm-chairs so dear to the Parisian heart, sat the man they both believed to be dead—the veritable Ronald Yorke, whose poor young fiancée had first been summoned to his death-bed, and then informed her journey would be too late, as all was over.

Who sent the two telegrams which reached Fernlea? Who composed them, and for what end we cannot stop to enter into now. One fact must suffice us—they were both false in every particular, for here sat Ronald, as strong and well as when he left Fernlea the day before; and though his brow was perturbed, and his mind harassed by more than one anxious thought, the most anxious and nervous of friends could have had no fear for his bodily health.

He was thinking of Natalie and the strange difficulties which pursued their love. He did not fear the child's constancy. Ronald was one of those men who trust all in all when they once trust at all.

He felt quite certain of his Nita's faith, but he did not hide from himself that the poor girl might have a great deal to bear at her mother's hands in the months that must elapse before the law acknowledged her right to marry whom she would.

He was not far from forty, but he had never loved before. The grave, thoughtful scholar had not wasted his heart in petty flirtations and trifling love affairs; he had it free and entire to pour out on Natalie. He was young for his years; many people would have guessed his age at thirty, or even twenty-eight.

Ronald, though the least conceited of men, knew perfectly that his age was not Lady Julia's objection to his suit. It could not be

his lack of means, since the provision he could make for Natalie would secure her from any fear of poverty. Then what was it? That was the question Mr. Yorke asked himself as he sat alone on that August evening.

It seemed to him he should feel far more hopeful for the future if once he could fathom this one thing—solve this one doubt.—Why did Lady Julia Daventry object to him for a son-in-law?

"She cannot suspect my secret," the young man mused. "Even if she did I can't see why it should be an obstacle. I must go to work carefully with Howard, and see how much he knows."

But there is a famous proverb in an old-fashioned cookery book anent the dressing of hares, which commences "first catch your hare," and poor Ronald might as well have prefaced his plans regarding Nita's brother with the suggestion "first catch John Howard," for it seemed to be a work of considerable difficulty.

He had called at once at the address given him, but found that the people there denied all knowledge of Mr. Howard's present whereabouts. They acknowledged letters came there for him, and these were regularly fetched away by a Monsieur Duval, who was an intimate friend of Mr. Howard's. This much they communicated readily enough, but they positively declared they knew nothing more.

"Of course M. Duval could give me his friend's address?"

The astute Frenchman smiled cautiously. "It is possible, sir," he answered, civilly; "but M. Duval himself is a bird of passage. I have not set eyes on him for weeks."

"What is his profession?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"I never heard he had one, sir. He plays cards remarkably well, and is a good hand at billiards. Then he has plenty of rich relations. As to doing anything for a livelihood, I don't believe he would dream of such a thing!"

"I wish you would describe him to me," said Ronald, seized with a most unwelcome fear.

The man was quite willing. According to him Duval was tall and slight, with black hair and very bushy whiskers, a bronzed complexion, and an aristocratic air.

Mr. Yorke breathed again.

Jack Howard was fair and pale, his complexion delicate as a girl's, and his face destitute even of a moustache, so that, save in the "aristocratic air" the description did not in the least apply.

Ronald meant to marry Natalie, whatever revelations he made about her family; but he was thankful her brother, the one person who seemed to care for her, was not to be identified with the very shady individual described by the waiter.

The latter looked at Ronald reflectively.

"If it is a question of money," he said, civilly, "I should say it was no use your staying. M. Duval never pays anyone; it's a little way he has."

"A most unpleasant little way," replied Ronald; "but, my friend, it is not a question of money. All I want of M. Duval is Mr. Howard's address, and for that I should be willing to pay him handsomely."

The waiter grinned. He had his own ideas on the subject of M. Duval's relations with Mr. Howard.

"But you expect money from Mr. Howard?" he insinuated, quietly. "He, perhaps, is in your debt?"

"He does not owe me a farthing, and my business is altogether of a family nature, and nothing whatever to do with money."

"Well, sir, I should say M. Duval would not mind seeing you, and if I come across him—I do sometimes—I'll tell him you've been here."

"Give him that," and Ronald handed him a card, on which he had scribbled the name of his hotel, and this line, "Let me see you at once concerning 'N,' and take this for your trouble."

The waiter pocketed the sovereign, and promised to do his best; but Ronald returned to his hotel in anything but a hopeful frame of mind.

Look which way he would things seemed gloomy. He had no hope of moving Lady Julia, excepting through her son; and though he told himself over and over again she could not shut up Nita in a French convent against her will, he felt a strange fear of her strong will and determined purpose—a woman who would stand at nothing to remove an obstacle from her path—a woman, too, with handsome face and fascinating ways, which would not only disarm suspicion, but win assistance in her schemes.

He could depend on no one but himself. Mr. Gray had promised to befriend Nita, but his business relations with the Daventrys were such he could hardly aid her against her mother. Norman Anstruther was so madly in love with Joan that he would prefer to see things with her eyes. Some mysterious power had removed the old nurse who would have watched over his darling, and now it seemed that throughout the length of England Natalie had no friend.

Ronald went to bed early, but he could not sleep. For hours he lay awake, thinking over the perplexities of his position, and when at last his weary eyes closed, his slumber was broken by a dream so vivid that he could hardly believe it was a vision.

It seemed to him he was in a village, and from the dress of the passers-by—the sabots and white caps instead of bonnets—he knew he was in France. An invisible hand took him by the hand and led him on, sorely against his will, till they came to a high stone wall which seemed to enclose about two acres of ground. In one side of the wall was a small gate. He could not see who was pressing him on, but he felt the pressure on his arm, and he actually heard the rattle of the keys with which his invisible guide unlocked the gate. He remembered long afterwards how he shuddered when it closed behind them with a weird, melancholy clang.

Yet the scene which broke on his eyes was fair enough. A garden, bright with summer flowers, and beyond it an orchard full of fruit trees; then further back, a large, white stone house, with every blind lowered as though no sunbeam might enter there. His guide—that strange, invisible guide, whose presence he felt so distinctly, yet could not see—stopped abruptly, and a voice sounded in his ear,—

"Look!"

He looked as directed, but saw nothing. At last, there stood before him a girl, robed as a novice, her long veil falling back from her close white cap, a large silver cross and wooden rosary round her neck. He did not need to look at the face of the novice; he knew by instinct it was Nita. Nita, indeed, but, oh! how changed! Thin and worn, as though by months of grief, with pale, wan cheeks and weary, languid eyes—eyes which had a strange, far-off sadness in their wild depths, which seemed indeed to see nothing close at hand, but to be always busy with something far away.

"Nita!" he cried, passionately. "Nita, my love, my life! Have I found you at last?"

But she did not see him. She did not even seem to hear. She sat down on a rustic bench, and began to tell her beads.

"Nita!" he cried again. "My darling, don't you know me? I am Ronald—your own Ronald—come back to claim you!"

"It is of no use," said the voice of his hidden guide, "she does not hear you. She hears nothing of the outside world now. She is shut up for ever within these walls."

"Never!" cried Ronald, passionately. "I will rescue her if there be law or justice in France. I tell you she is my betrothed—my life—my love—my all!"

"She may have been, but that is past and gone. She is here now—for life."

"Never!"

"For life," went on the voice, persistently.

"None who come here and wear that dress ever pass through those gates again. They stay here through youth and womanhood, through middle life and old age, until at last the chain of their bondage is broken, and they are laid to take their rest in the quiet graveyard beyond the orchard."

He seized upon the hand; he could not see the speaker. The figure of Nita was fading from his view, the whole picture of the nunnery grounds seemed passing from his eyes; but the hand at least was tangible. He seized it and pressed it, as though to arrest attention.

"She is mine—mine! Tell me how to save her?"

"Why should you ask me?"

"Because you would not have brought me here had it been only to torture me. Because," he went on, passionately, "I believe you have shown me a picture merely of what may be, not of what is. Tell me how to save her, and I will bless you all my life!"

"You love her?"

"I have told you so."

"Lady Julia will never let her marry you—or anyone. It would not be safe."

"But why?"

The nunnery gardens had vanished completely by this time. Ronald stood alone in a picturesque village lane; that is, he saw no one near him but the strange pressure on his arm declared his invisible friend had not really left him.

"There are but two can help you," said the voice, slowly. "Janet Dent and John Howard!"

"You know the one has disappeared?"

"Then search for the other."

"But,"—and the agony in the man's voice was terrible to hear—"but what if I am too late?"

"Then remember this dream."

He awoke—hot, weary, tired, and unrefreshed.

"If nights were often like that, where would be the use of sleeping?" he asked himself, as he made a hasty toilet.

And then, while waiting for his breakfast, he took up pencil and paper, and with a few rapid strokes sketched the grey old nunnery he had seen in his dream, and the pretty village lane near which it stood.

"It is all nonsense," he muttered, as he sat down to breakfast—it must be confessed with but scanty appetite—"of course, I dreamed of Nita. There's nothing extraordinary in that, and as my lady was threatening to shut her up in a convent, it was natural I should fancy she was there; but all the same, I wish I had not dreamed it. I was uneasy enough before, and I must say this has made me more so."

He was not a businesslike man; artists seldom are. It never came into his mind to write to Norman Anstruther or Mr. Gray, giving them his address, and urging them to send him news of Fernlea daily, even if they had nothing to say except that things were going on exactly the same.

He had once been in Paris with Anstruther, and they had put up at this hotel; therefore he never dreamed but what his friend would understand he was staying there, without a letter to tell him so.

Regarding Mr. Gray—Ronald's opinion of Lady Julia was such—he honestly believed she would intercept any letters she pleased that came to Fernlea; therefore he did not care to write to the lawyer whilst her guest. Then he had the true masculine hatred of letter-writing. He hoped to be at home in a few days; that is to say, in London. Strictly speaking, Ronald had no home of his own, and he saw no occasion for correspondence in the meanwhile.

To find Jack was his first thought—it may be said his only one. He sought out such of his acquaintance in Paris who might know something of the young ne'er-do-well; but it was not until he had been away from Fernlea more than a week that he obtained any

clue, and then it came from a good-humoured young Englishman, who was studying at one of the Paris hospitals.

"I know Jack Howard? Of course I do, Yorke; and I've seen rather more of him lately than I care about. That young fellow will drink himself to death before he's thirty unless he turns over a new leaf."

This was not encouraging.

"I never heard he was given to that!"

"Didn't you? He has been going the pace for a long while. When his family went to England, and there was no need for him to feign even an appearance of respectability, he went still faster on the road to ruin. How shocked you look, Yorke! I'd no idea you were intimate with him."

"I know his family, and I came to Paris on purpose to see him!"

The young doctor shook his head.

"You'll never reform Jack Howard. I don't believe it is he won't keep straight so much as that he can't. His father drank himself to death, so you see the mania is hereditary."

"I saw him a year or so ago. He was all right then!"

"I daresay. It used to be only occasional outbreaks, but he's been drinking hard lately for a good while."

"It is of the utmost importance that I should see him. Harley, couldn't you get me his address?"

"I'll take you to his quarters myself if you like; but I don't think you'll make much of him. He hasn't spoken rationally for days."

Ronald abandoned. It was Nita's brother he heard this of. How she would feel the degradation if she ever learned it!

"His mother ought to know."

"His mother washed her hands of him when she went to England."

"But still, she is his mother."

"I don't fancy there is much love lost between them. Are you a friend of Lady Julia?"

"Most decidedly not!"

Harley looked surprised.

"I fancied I had divined your business with poor Jack. Through his disasters, I have come to know something of his story, and I believe the real cause of his rupture with his mother is some papers that he obstinately refuses to give up. Whether they affect any serious family matter I can't say; but I do know—for I have read her letters myself—Lady Julia is prepared to pay a heavy price for them. In her last she offered a thousand pounds down, and an allowance of five hundred a-year for life."

"And he refused?"

"When the letter came he had not a shilling in his pocket. His wife and child—what didn't you know he was married?—were absolutely in want, but he refused his mother's offer. Naturally, when you said you wanted to see him on a family matter, I imagined you had come to make a last bid for the documents."

"What are they?"

"I have no idea. I have sometimes wondered whether there was anything irregular in Lady Julia's second marriage, and these papers related to that."

"She married William Daventry of Fernlea."

"And his father, the old Squire, refused to see either of them again. As a fact, he never did see either. He took the sole charge of his grandchild, and, as I am told, refused to notice the daughter of the second marriage."

Ronald started—a strange suspicion dawned on him.

"Harley, can I trust you?"

"Yes! I never betray a secret, Yorke, and I have listened to many!"

"I am engaged to Lady Julia's daughter, but she positively refuses to accept me as a son-in-law. She declares she would rather shut up Nita in a French convent."

"Well!"

"Do you think that means there was some-

thing irregular in her second marriage, and that Natalie is illegitimate?"

"I suppose that would change your wishes?" Yorke turned on him indignantly.

"It would make me the more anxious to marry her, and it would remove the need of waiting for Lady Julia's consent. An illegitimate child is nobody's daughter in the eyes of the law, and so can marry without parental sanction."

"You are a good fellow, Ronald!" said the young doctor, as he wrung his hand, "and you deserve a good wife. If you marry Natalie Daventry I am sure of this much—you will never have to blush for her parentage. I have been with Jack a good deal, and heard much of his ravings. It would be a breach of honour to repeat what I only heard from such a channel; but I will stake my word on this—the young lady of whom you have been talking is the lawful child of the late William Daventry."

"Then I am as far from a clue to Lady Julia's objections as ever."

"And I cannot help you. I have my own suspicions, but they are not certainties. Only to me the truth seems so palpable. I wonder it has never dawned on you!"

Ronald shook his head.

"It never has. Lady Julia hates Nita—or I think so. She is most anxious to get rid of her, and to be sure she will cost her nothing. Yet she will not let her be my wife!"

"Or anyone else's wife. Any other suitor would be equally objectionable."

"How could you guess that?"

"Never mind!"

"Well, it is quite true!"

"What made you think of coming to Howard?"

"Nita is very fond of him, and I think he cares for her. Once, before I had ever seen her, he asked me to be kind to his little sister. I thought he might reason with his mother."

Young Harley smiled.

"I'm afraid he's not in a state to reason with anyone. He's been drinking recklessly lately; but I'm quite sure you are right in one thing—he is fond of Miss Nita. He married a ballet-dancer a year ago for no earthly reason but she was alone in the world, and he pitied her because she had eyes like his sister's."

"He must have a good heart!"

"No one's enemy but his own. Well, shall I take you there to-night?"

"I wish you would!"

The gas was lighted in the streets that evening when Dr. Harley and Ronald Yorke left the fashionable quarter of Paris, and turned into one of the many narrow thoroughfares that belong to the Faubourg Montmartre. It was a very dingy neighbourhood and a very dreary-looking house before which the doctor at last stopped.

"Now prepare for an ascent. The Howards live next the roof, and I warn you seven flights of steps require a considerable amount of breath."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"I was here three days ago. I thought him better then unless he had a relapse. I warned the wife to come to me if he seemed worse; but as she has not done so I expect it is all right."

Ronald had been some days in Paris now. It was more than a week since he had had that remarkable dream. Hope was getting sadly low at his heart, poor fellow! No news had come to him from Fernlea. He had begun to deem Norman faithless, and to despair of winning Nita until she came of age. He looked troubled and careworn enough as he followed his guide up the steep stairs. Midway they paused to take breath, and Harley said, slowly,—

"You had better see him alone. Mind you, I say nothing against his wife, but she is painfully poor, and I have sometimes fancied she would sell those papers to Lady Julia gladly if she could only find them. It is natural, perhaps, she should think of her husband and

child's interests before anything else, but—don't trust her."

A very pretty young woman opened the door to them, and Ronald acknowledged at once that her violet eyes might to some people recall Nita's, but it was only the most trivial resemblance. Madame had a piquant, laughing face; and though sorrow and privation had done much to refine it, it could never compare to Natalie's wistful loveliness.

"He is better!" she said in her own language, in reply to Dr. Harley's questions, "much better to-night!"

"I have brought a friend to see him—a compatriot!"

He looked at the young woman as he spoke, and Marie, who had plenty of tact, understood her absence was desired, even before he said, "this gentleman comes from Lady Julia Daventry, and it may be of great advantage to your husband to see him."

Madame shook her head and shrugged her shoulders in a way that was entirely French.

"It is no use," she said, placidly. "He is as obstinate as a mule; he will never hear reason!"

"But you will let us try?" pleaded Ronald, who did not see fit to unhesitate her as to his errand.

Madame was most willing. She transported herself and her baby downstairs to talk to the wife of the *Concierge*, and the two visitors were free to enter her husband's presence.

He looked very ill, that was Ronald's first impression; his second, that poor Howard was in no wise surprised at his coming. He had yet to learn that when any human soul hovers on the edge of the shore of death nothing earthly can astonish it very much.

"Ah, Yorke!" and he gave him his wasted hand with readiness. "Do you bring me news of Fernlea?"

The voice, the manner and bearing, were all those of a gentleman, but the room was poor even to meanness, and the clothes in which the invalid was arrayed would not have fetched him a trifling loan at the *Mont de pitié*, which in France answers to a pawnbroker's, a black wig and bushy whiskers standing conspicuously on a chest of drawers; and one or two envelopes lying about addressed to Mr. Deval told Ronald that his first suspicion had been correct.

Dr. Harley exchanged a glance with Ronald as though to ask if he should retreat; but Mr. Yorke shook his head.

"I came from England on purpose to see you. I have been looking for you ten days; at times I nearly gave up the chase in despair."

Jack smiled.

"I should not have thought anyone would be so anxious to see me as all that. My mother could have given you my address?"

"But she has quarrelled with me. She turned me out of Fernlea, and has intimated I am never to set foot in it again."

"Then I can guess the cause—Natalie!"

Ronald Yorke bent over him with intense earnestness; he really did pin his last hopes of softening Lady Julia on this tottering invalid.

"You will help me, Howard, won't you? You know you asked me once to be kind to your little sister. Well, I crave nothing better than to be good to Nita all her days. I want her for my wife—the queen of my heart and home!"

"And my mother?"

"Refuses point-blank!"

"Her reason?"

"The only one I could get was that she designed Nita for a nun; but that's absurd, Howard!"

Jack smiled sardonically.

"Right! It is absurd for a woman who has led such a life as Lady Julia's to talk about religious scruples. She is my mother, and though she has shown me little kindness, I would gladly have spared her; but I told

her years ago she should never shut up Nita in a convent, and she never shall!"

He leant back almost spent by the effort of so much talking. Dr. Harley held a glass of water to his lips, and then whispered to Mr. Yorke,—

"You must not excite him, as the result may be fatal; his heart is diseased, and any shock may carry him off at a moment's notice."

Poor Ronald! He was in a terrible plight. All his hopes rested on Jack Howard, and yet he was in such a state it seemed cruel to agitate him, as the story needs must do.

"I am better now," said the sick man, slowly. "What were you saying? You love Natalie? Answer me one question honestly. Does she love you back again?"

"She does!"

"Then I am satisfied."

"And you will help us?"

Jack shook his head.

"I will put it into your own power to help yourself. I will leave you papers which will make my mother thankful to come to terms with you; but, remember, to do any good you must break off your engagement with Natalie."

"Never!"

"Then it will be all in vain."

"I only want Nita," urged Ronald. "I don't mind if Lady Julia refuses to buy her even a wedding-dress! If she comes to me with only one of her white frocks it will be quite enough. I want nothing from your mother!"

"You are disinterested?"

"I am not; I want Nita! Howard, won't you help me?"

"I will. Be easy, Yorke. I know you will be good to her, and that I can trust you. I will give you a pocket-book. Swear to me not to open it until Joan Daventry comes of age, and then you will be able to dictate your own terms to my mother."

"But that is four months hence!"

"I cannot help you unless you promise me to wait till then. I dare not explain it to you. After all she is my mother; but I believe if Lady Julia knew you possessed those papers she would hide Natalie from you so securely that when the time for action came neither you nor anyone else could find her."

A strange fear came into Ronald's eyes; they looked straight into Jack's, with a fearful question in their silent glance.

"Yes," was the unexpected reply, "for my sake—for Nita's—will you keep the secret. But there have been times before in her career when Lady Julia has taken a life that stood between her and happiness. I would do much to save you, but I know my mother, and I will not have Nita's life endangered for any hasty impatience of yours. Swear to keep those papers untouched until Joan comes of age, and you shall have a hold on my mother which will make her powerless to oppose you!"

Still Ronald hesitated.

Dr. Harley interposed.

"Have you any chance apart from Howard's proposal? Do you see the slightest hope of marrying the young lady before next January?"

"No. I fear if I am left unaided to cope with Lady Julia I can do nothing, and shall have to wait more than two years hence, till Nita comes of age."

"Then you had better accept Mr. Howard's offer."

Ronald agreed. Jack took from a shabby desk a well-worn pocket-book, and was about to fasten it when a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"I had better see that they are all here. I have not looked at them for months."

The pocket-book was empty!

A terrible blank fell on the three men. Jack felt the one selfish purpose of his life was balked. The papers he had kept for Nita's sake, refusing a thousand pounds' bribe and a handsome annuity that he might save them

for her, were gone. He was dying, he knew that; even if it were possible to trace the papers he had no time. His one ambition was foiled; he had no power to secure his little sister's happiness.

And Ronald! He never knew how much he had depended upon poor Howard's aid, until he saw the pocket-book on which so much hung empty. He sat as one overwhelmed by an amazing calamity.

The invalid was the first to speak—only three words—and the weak, fluttering voice told how much the shock had cost him.

"Call my wife."

Dr. Harley looked sharply at Marie as she entered. From the moment the absence of the papers had been discovered he set her down in his mind as the culprit.

She walked straight up to her husband's side, and stood looking defiantly at the intruders.

"You have killed him!"

"Nay, madame," said the doctor, indignantly, pointing to the empty pocket-book, "it is the loss of what he valued most that is killing him. The discovery, too, of the treachery and betrayal of the one person he trusted."

She turned to her husband.

"Jack!"

"The papers!" he gasped.

"Bah!" said Marie, resolved to carry it off with a high hand. "Those worthless, musty, old things? What a fuss to make about them!"

But Jack caught her hand and held it in a close, deathlike pressure.

"Marie—for the child's sake—the truth! For Babette's sake, where are they?"

She was touched then.

"I sold them! Oh, Jack, don't look at me like that! You were away, and we were so poor. There was not a penny in my purse, not a crust of bread for the child. What good were those musty old papers? I sold them!"

"To whom?—where?"

"Two months ago—to a lady—an Englishwoman, for her French was not like ours. She gave me twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds! and I refused a thousand! Thou didst not make much by thy treachery, my poor Marie!"

But Ronald interposed.

"Describe the woman, if you please, madame?"

She did her best; but though the brief description would have applied to Lady Julia fairly, it would have answered equally for a dozen ladies of Ronald's acquaintance. Still, no one but Lady Julia had any object in stealing the papers; no one else probably knew of their existence, therefore there could be no doubt as to poor Marie's customer.

"My mother!" said Jack, feebly. "And but last week I had a letter repeating her offer of a thousand. How she must have laughed in her sleeve!"

"Thy mother?" interposed Marie. "She was not like thee."

"No, Yorke," he said, feebly, turning to Ronald, "you will not blame me for this? I would have helped you if I could."

"I know it."

"And now I can but give you one piece of advice. Go back to Fernlea, and never leave the village until you take Nita with you. Give her my love—may you be happy!"

His voice broke off abruptly then, his head sank back.

Marie guessed the truth, and broke into a passionate burst of weeping. The dead man might have been a ne'er-do-well, and a creature respectable folks would shun, but he had been a kind, affectionate husband, and now she was a widow.

Although her avarice had wrecked his hopes, Ronald could not find it in his heart to leave poor Marie without some substantial assistance. He gave her five pounds for immediate needs, and promised to take the expenses of the funeral on himself; then he thankfully



["I TOLD LADY JULIA, YEARS AGO," THE INVALID SAID, "THAT SHE SHOULD NEVER SHUT NITA UP, AND SEE NEVER SHALL."]

followed Dr. Harley down the long, long staircase out into the summer night.

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes," returned Ronald; "he was no one's enemy but his own. I always liked him!"

"But you can't know what the disappointment was to him. There was a great deal of charity in Jack's nature, and that little sister's wrongs were very near his heart. To make Lady Julia do her justice was, I believe the dream of his life!"

Ronald stared.

"Do you think he was sensible when he said that—that?"

"He was sensible the whole time we were there. What are you referring to?"

Mr. Yorke shuddered.

"You must have heard," he said; "at least, he implied Lady Julia had not always respected a life that stood between her and her own pleasures; but Nita is her own daughter, her only child now. Surely she can't be in danger from her mother?"

"My dear fellow, you will worry yourself into a nervous fever if you go on like this!"

"Do answer me?"

"I don't like what I hear of Lady Julia. In your place I should go to Fernlea and follow poor Howard's advice. Never leave the village until you take Miss Natalie with you."

There was an unusual gravity in his tone. Try as he would to speak hopefully he had been much impressed by poor Howard's last words, and he had the key to them that Ronald did not possess, since he had attended Jack in more than one of the delirious attacks brought on by his besetting sin, and he knew how well his ravings then pieced out and fitted in with the hints dropped at this last interview; but young as he was, Noel Harley was a very judicious friend. He felt that Ronald had quite enough to make him anxious without his augmenting his fears by a single word; and so he concealed his own misgivings as well as he could, and contented

himself by endorsing poor Jack's last warning, and advising Ronald to go to Fernlea at once, and not leave it without his bride.

It was a very simple funeral, as those of the poor mostly are. Following the French custom it took place the day after death, so that paying the last tribute of goodwill to her brother only delayed Ronald's return to Nita by a single day.

He shook hands warmly with Dr. Harley when they parted, and the latter wished him *bonne chance*.

"I shall keep an eye on poor Howard's widow. She did us an ugly turn, but I don't think it was meant maliciously, and we have no idea how tempting twenty pounds looks to people as poor as she is!"

"I can't blame her. It was natural enough." "And Yorke, let me know how you get on! I assure you I am deeply interested in your romance."

It was almost a fortnight after his betrothal—nearly two weeks since his parting from Natalie—that Ronald, after a pleasant passage, found himself once more in England. Anxious as he was to reach Fernlea he made his way to London first, for he decided Mr. Gray's visit to Blankshire must have come to an end, and he wanted a confidential interview with the lawyer before he took up his abode again at the Fernlea inn.

He knew Mr. Gray was Lady Julia's legal adviser, but he was also Mr. Yorke's, and Ronald believed, for his mother's sake, the solicitor would hardly refuse to listen to him; besides, once away from Fernlea, he might be a more able ally. He it was who had told Ronald he did not quite trust Lady Julia; he it was who had been favoured with a visit from the Daventry ghost; and, in fact, Ronald believed if he could only win Mr. Gray over to his side it would be a most important achievement.

It was getting late in the afternoon—not far from five o'clock—when he turned into the Temple, but then he knew Mr. Gray mostly

stayed till nearly six at his office, so that he was not afraid of disappointment. If he found him gone he meant to pursue him to his family abode, for Ronald rarely failed when he had set his mind on a thing, and his resolution was taken "to have it out" with the lawyer before he went to bed.

He knocked at the door and the clerk opened it—not one of those to whom he was familiar, but a junior, evidently new to his work.

"Is Mr. Gray in?"

"He's just going, sir," said the boy, civilly; "but I can take your name in."

"Do," said Roland, carelessly. "Mr. Yorke."

But the youthful messenger returned promptly.

"Mr. Gray says there's some mistake, sir. He knows no Mr. Yorke."

Was the lawyer transformed into his enemy? Had he gone over so utterly to Lady Julia's side as to deny even Ronald's acquaintance? One moment, and our hero brushed past the astonished office boy, and walked into Mr. Gray's private room.

He saw the lawyer turn ashen white and turn as though to flee, and he exclaimed, without a thought how true was the careless question,—

"Good gracious, Mr. Gray! What are you afraid of? Do you take me for a ghost?"

(To be continued.)

THERE is no happiness in the world equal to that of blessing others. Not only by giving money to the needy, help to the sick, food to the hungry, is this blessing compassed: we gain it as we give it, by sympathy, by affection, by seeing that which is best in our friends and shutting our eyes to that which is worst, by taking joy in their good things even when our own portion is scant and poor.



[ROY AMORY'S GIFT.]

NOVELLETTE.]

A ROSE OF MAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE wanderer had returned to his home, but there was no gladness on his face, no gladness in his heart! Why should there be?

Sixteen years ago he had gone into voluntary exile; sixteen years ago he had turned his back upon his native land, a ruined and outraged man.

As he stood in the highway looking beyond park and meadow to the dull grey walls of the Manor, his brows contracted, and his eyes grew more sombre as he thought of the day on which he passed out of the huge gates, mad with misery and dishonour.

Only the morning before he had risen full of glad, exultant life, believing himself the happiest man under the sun.

He had spent the long hours with his beautiful wife and his dearest friend, and had planned pleasant excursions for the remainder of the former's stay at the Manor.

The next day he found himself ruined by the man for whom he had stood bond—betrayed by the wife he had loved with all the passionate fervour of a strong nature.

They had flown together, she taking all her jewels and as much gold as she could find in his desk.

He had followed them, intent upon revenge, but the false wife escaped him in a tragic way. She was climbing the Alps with her paramour when her foot slipped, or she turned giddy—no one seemed rightly to know which—and she fell over a terrible precipice, and her body was never recovered.

Ludwig Hargrave, too, eluded the wronged husband, and no one knew where he had hidden himself.

For sixteen years Rolf Strong had wandered

whither his melancholy fancy listed, heedless of the duties waiting him in England, afraid to remember that the little child of two, who had bidden him a tearful good-bye, was growing nearer to womanhood with each passing year.

Often and often, thinking of the old adage, "Like mother, like daughter," he wished her dead!

Then, again, he would pray that she might not fulfil the promise of beauty she had given when a child. Her mother's beauty had been her ruin.

He scarcely ever wrote, never unless it was absolutely necessary, and he never encouraged the girl to correspond with him, so that father and child were as very strangers, each to the other.

She was eighteen now, and it was necessary that she should have a protector, stronger and abler than poor little Miss Rance, her governess, who had clung to her, loved her for her father's sake.

How changed the old place was! The park palings were broken in sundry places, the hedges ragged and untrimmed!

A few deer were visible, and they came cautiously to look at the man who stood by the iron gates, fighting with his deadly anguish.

They did not recognise him, although once they had answered his call as readily as his favourite hound.

He laughed loudly and bitterly, and the startled deer fled across the park at topmost speed.

He pushed open the heavy gates and entered. How quiet the place was! Scarcely even a bird's song stirred the heavy silence!

Rolf Strong strode on his way, wondering how his daughter would receive him, and what changes he would find in the old home.

The grass grew long and thick up the broad drive, and where myriads of flowers had once bloomed he saw only weeds. The man's great heart began to fail him.

No one came to the hall-door to welcome him, no one saw him, there was no sign of life about the place.

A honeysuckle hung its long tendrils over the porch, so low that one must brush them aside if one would enter; an unpruned magnolia almost hid the windows from view.

Evidently it was long since a foot had crossed the threshold, for the moss grew soft and green upon the steps.

Groaning, the man rung the bell. How the shrill peal echoed through the silent passages! And as he waited he heard slow steps approaching, then a woman's voice bidding some one open the door quickly, next the sound of bolts withdrawn, and then the door was cautiously opened by an old servant-man, behind whom stood a woman wearing a frilled cap. The latter flung up her hands at seeing Rolf.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she cried. "My prayers are heard, master, and you have come at last!"

The master was touched more than he cared to show by the simple, genuine joy the old couple displayed at his return, and—perhaps to cover his emotion—said, brusquely,—

"Do you always live at the back of the house?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Mead, apologetically. "You see there's no one but Mead and me to keep the place tidy."

And she would have broken out into rapturous exclamations once more had not a little elderly lady appeared on the scene.

She must have been pretty once, and even now her face had a delicate bloom like a young girl's; but it faded when she saw the dark-bearded man standing in the hall, and she tried vainly to speak or move.

Mr. Strong went forward, and took her trembling hands in his kindly.

"Haven't you a word of welcome for me, Miss Rance?"

Tears came into the faded but still pretty eyes.

"Oh!" she said, with quivering lips, "how glad I am! How glad Yolande will be!" At his daughter's name he frowned, and turned aside.

"Where is she?" he asked, coldly.

"In the roseray. Let me run and prepare her to meet you."

"No, no! I would see her in a natural mood. I do not wish her to have leisure to frame any pretty speeches. I will take her by surprise. Tell me, has she grown like her mother?"

"She is like, and yet unlike; and distinctly different in ways and heart."

"Thank Heaven for that, although I am afraid, you guileless soul, you are not a very good judge of character. And I suppose Yolande has never been exposed to temptation of any kind?"

"Beyond an occasional walk through the village, and the Sunday services, she has seen nothing of life. We never have a visitor, and she has no companions."

"Humph! Then as yet her virtues only are apparent, her vices sleep. There, I did not mean to hurt you. Oh, you have turned the old library into a general living room! Thanks, no; I will not wait for any refreshments. I am going to find my daughter."

He passed out of the French window, and walked through the neglected but fragrant gardens, until he came to the confines of the roseray.

Many of his favourite bushes were long since dead, but there was still a profusion of blooms, or would be in a week or two.

Brambles trailed along the ripe, tall grass, and many brilliant-hued buds peeped up from their green bed.

Here and there a discoloured statue gleamed through the mass of foliage, and the tinkling of a fountain made pleasant music close by.

Here he had been wont to walk with his young wife, for whom he planned all good and beautiful things; and here, through swaying branches, he saw her child and his coming towards him, but wholly unconscious of his presence.

She was walking slowly, her head bent over a small volume, her eyes intent upon its pages; and the man drew a sharp breath as he watched her.

Taller than her mother, and with a nobler beauty than she had ever possessed, and yet sufficiently like the dead woman to be recognised as her daughter.

She wore an old-fashioned gown of *de laine*, with sprigs of roses and forget-me-nots about it—(he remembered the morning his wife had first appeared in it). It was short in the skirt and somewhat scanty, and the sleeves displayed the white, slender wrists liberally.

Her head was uncovered, and the sun turned her bright brown hair into a golden crown.

She was fair and sweet enough to win his heart, and yet he felt no love for her.

"Yolande," he said, in a low deep voice, and the girl started violently, "Yolande, do you know me?"

She began to tremble and grew very white as he advanced and offered his hand; then, with a sudden gesture, she threw her arms about his neck.

"Father, father!" she said, and her lovely face was instinct with rapture, her beautiful brown eyes full of happy tears. "You will stay with me now—always? Oh, the time has been sad without you!" and she threw back her head the better to look into his face.

With gentle coldness he unlocked her slender, clinging hands, and, holding her at arm's length, looked earnestly into her eyes.

"I wonder," he said, "if you are as good as you are beautiful?"

She shrank a little from him, chilled by his manner. She had expected to receive passionate embraces, to listen to loving words. The beautiful mouth quivered, and her colour came and went fitfully.

"Father!" she said, scarcely above a whisper, "are you not glad to see me, or have you

stayed so long away you do not love me? Oh! if you knew how often I have pictured your home-coming, what grand dreams I have dreamed of, how we would spend our days together—"

He interrupted her with a harsh laugh.

"What a home-coming! The grass grows in the drive where once friends came by scores; the house is a ruin, my fortune is at the lowest ebb, and there is no one to welcome me."

"Save Yolande," she said, in a low, unsteady voice. "Oh, my dear! I know how you have suffered! I know how bitterly you have mourned any mother; but surely you will let me be some help, some comfort to you?"

"What do you know of your mother?" he questioned, with averted eyes.

"Ah! so little; nothing but that she died young, that she was beautiful, and you loved her as your life!"

Mr. Strong groaned in the bitterness of his heart, and once more the girl ventured to lay her hand upon his arm.

"Often and often," she said, wistfully, "I have longed to hear all her story, but neither Head nor Miss Rance will tell me anything; they shake their heads and say, 'It is a painful subject: her loss broke your father's heart.'"

"And this is all you know? You have never heard how she died?"

"No; and day after day I sit before her picture and wonder if all would have been different if she had lived. Oh! I wish I could remember her, how she looked and spoke."

The man beside her winced; then said, hoarsely,—

"It is as well you should remain in ignorance."

"You mean because to hear all would sadden me?" she questioned, lifting her eyes to his haggard, dark face. "You have all been so thoughtful for me, but I do not think it wise to keep all sorrow or shadow of sorrow from me."

He regarded her with a sort of surprise. It was not thus her mother would have spoken; she was fearful if her pleasure were spoiled but for a day; and he said, in a gentler tone than he had yet used,—

"Be happy while you may, Yolande; there is sorrow in store for all. You cannot hope to escape the common lot. Is your life pleasant here?"

"In the summer, yes; and now that you have come I shall have nothing to wish for."

"But in the winter, Yolande? You are anxious to leave Blowe?"

"Yes. I should like to see something of the world. Are you angry?" as he frowned upon her. "Is it not natural? I am so young, and I have no companions."

"Yes it is natural," coldly, and added, *sotto voce*, "you are your mother's daughter."

"Father!" the sweet young voice was very wistful, the beautiful tawny brown eyes were suspiciously moist. "Do you know you have not kissed me yet?"

He turned from her half in anger, half in pain—her voice had sounded so like her mother's—and strode towards the house, leaving her alone.

She did not attempt to follow him, but she watched him through her blinding tears, and with hands fast locked. In her heart she wondered why he should hate her, and prayed passionately that she might find some way to turn his love towards her.

Then she went back to the house, and found her way to the study. It presented a striking contrast to all the other unused rooms, for it had been Yolande's special care and delight to keep it bright for "father's coming."

There were flowers in the windows, little dainty nick-nacks tastefully arranged, and not a speck of dust visible in any corner or crevice. Over the mantelpiece hung the portrait of a young and beautiful woman, richly dressed, and wearing blood-red rubies in her hair. Yolande went forward, and, kneeling on a chair, looked into the fair, sensuous face with eyes full of love and longing.

"Oh, mother! oh, my mother! Why did you leave me lonely? And why, if he so loved you, should he hate your child? Oh, teach me how to win his heart, how to make his sad life happy;" and suddenly she bowed her face upon her hands, and wept passionately.

Rolf Strong, standing in the doorway, listening to his daughter's pathetic appeal, felt softened towards her; and obeying his more generous impulse, advanced to her. She heard his step, and started erect. He saw her face was disfigured with tears, that, despite her efforts to regain her self-control, she was terribly agitated.

"Will you forgive me, child?" he said, tenderly; "I am a strange, uncouth fellow, but you must try to bear with me, and rub off some of my angles," and, stooping, he kissed the tearful mouth.

It seemed to her her prayer was already answered, and her gratitude made her speechless. She clung about him with tender hands as though, having found him, she could never let him go.

He drew her gently from the room, and she noticed that he never glanced at his wife's portrait, and wondered at the strangeness of man's grief.

"I, too, have lost her," she thought, "but I love to look on her beautiful face; it seems to bring her near."

She would have been considerably surprised and grieved had she known that, at midnight, when all others were sleeping, he stole to the study, and holding his candle high, gazed into the dead woman's face, with love and reproach struggling for mastery in his eyes.

"Alleya! Alleya!" he muttered, hoarsely.

"I wish you had died before you wrought the child this wrong. Oh! What a bitter dower you have given her! Woman, I wish I had killed you before the world knew your shame."

He lifted his hand as though he would strike the fair and smiling face; then, with a bitter groan, he turned away and crept up to his solitary room. It was long before he slept, and through all his dreams he saw Alleya, and always she came between Yolande and happiness.

CHAPTER II.

BUT Yolande found it very hard to win her father's love. He was harsh and stern in his manner towards her, and regarded all her ways and words with a suspicion she could not understand, and she would ask no questions of Miss Rance or Head, lest they should think she accused him unjustly.

She was very sad in those early days, so sad, that at times she would kneel before her mother's picture and pray her wildly to take her away. She was too innocent to guess that, day by day, her father's heart was yearning towards her, and only pride and a fear that she, too, would deceive him, made his manner so constrained.

Sometimes she walked with him in the park or garden. They scarcely ever crossed the boundary of his estate, but Yolande never complained; she seemed content with her books and his society. Then, too, she found endless amusement and pleasure with the old piano bought so long ago for her mother.

Mr. Strong watched her with surprise and growing love; it hurt him cruelly that all her life should be buried in the old Manor. It must not—it should not be. He would exert himself to make her days brighter, to bring some gleam of pleasure to her.

He was very watchful of her. In secret he had overhauled her little library, consisting wholly of books borrowed from the study. He found a Shakespeare amongst them, a Milton and Longfellow, volumes of Carlyle's, Dickens and Spencer's works, but nothing that could offend his taste, and he prayed with all his heart.—

"Heaven keep her pure!"

In the first few days following his return he noticed Miss Rance was busily employed

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making point lace, which she always hurried out of sight at Yolande's approach, and he asked in an amused way what was the mystery?

Little Miss Rance regarded him reproachfully.

"Don't you know? Why the thirty-first is Yolande's birthday, and I am working the lace for her."

"Of what use will it be in a place like Stowe—where she sees no one?"

"She won't always live at Stowe," promptly; "it is a sin to keep her buried here."

"Do you want her to go the same way her mother went?" he lamented, sternly.

"No," and the little lady met his regard unflinchingly, although her heart was throbbing most uncomfortably at her own temerity.

"But I maintain you are doing your daughter a cruel wrong in keeping her so secluded. If she had been in the habit of going abroad her mother's story would be well-nigh forgotten now; as it is, her first appearance in society will revive it in all its hideous details."

"And you, who love her, would advise me to subject her to bitter pain and humiliation?"

"Who would be so base as to tell her the truth? And I am anxious to see her comfortably settled, knowing what slender provision you can make for her. Mr. Strong, assert yourself. Go into society, live down your shame! Don't run away from it as cowards do."

The little woman's eyes kindled, and the gentle face flushed ruddily. Rolf Strong looked at her in amazement.

"I believe you are right. But if Yolande ever learns the truth?"

"Her love for you would help her to bear it," Miss Rance said, with conviction.

He was silent a moment, then said, "I have news for you. I have been striving to obtain employment since my return to England, and at last I have succeeded. I have secured the post of secretary to Lord Ringrove, the Tory whip, and enter on my duties next week. I have also advertised the Manor, and hope I have found a suitable tenant. I shall know by to-morrow's post."

"Oh! I am glad to hear of your success; but it will be an awful wrench to leave this dear old place! Where are we going—for I am to fit wish you?" she questioned anxiously.

"That goes without saying. I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose the trust of them all," he answered, with some emotion. "I have written to Elsie Marriott, my cousin, and Yolande's godmother, asking if she can recommend a small and suitable house. So you see both you and the child will be plunged at once into all sorts of gaieties. I want to see how she will comport herself under such strange circumstances."

"With the same sweetness that she has shown all through her life."

"I am afraid," he began, in his ordinary cynical tone; but Miss Rance interrupted him indignantly.

"If you doubt your daughter, why do you carry her where you hint temptation waits her? Rolf Strong, you ought to be ashamed of your suspicions. They are unworthy any Christian gentleman."

He laughed. It was such a new experience to see Miss Rance angry; and then, when he realised she was deeply hurt, he possessed himself of the little, busy, fluttering hands, and said gently,—

"Forgive me, I was wrong to play upon your affection in such fashion. I will endeavour not to offend again. And now I have taken you into my confidence, and I am sure you will not betray it. I wish Yolande to remain in ignorance of my movements until all is settled."

"You shall be obeyed implicitly," delighted at the trust reposed in her; "and now what are you going to give Yolande to-morrow?"

"I have no gift of any worth to offer. I shall simply ignore her birthday."

"She will feel it keenly if you do. There is that old gold bracelet you found after—after—"

"After my wife's flight," he supplemented, coldly. "Shall I offer my child a bauble too poor to excite her mother's cupidity? No!" passionately. "She shall, in future, wear nothing that wretched woman discarded, or left behind in her hurry," and he went out of the room frowning heavily.

So the next day Yolande waited vainly for his good wishes, and the sight of all the yards of filmy lace her governess had wrought for her only brought tears to her eyes, recalling vividly, as it did, her father's apparent neglect.

At night she crept close to him as they sat together in the darkening room.

"Have you forgotten this is my birthday?" she said, a little uncertainly.

The wistful tone touched him; but he said quietly, "Did you expect a gift?"

"No, dear; but I thought—I thought you would remember to wish me many happy returns. It is the first birthday we have spent together."

She ceased suddenly, and he felt rather than saw that her eyes were filled with bitter tears.

He drew her to him and kissed her tenderly. "It is not too late to offer you good wishes now. I have nothing else to give."

But she was satisfied.

The following day Mr. Strong received two letters; one from the eligible tenant, who wished to take immediate possession of the Manor for a term of three years, and at a liberal rent; the other from Mrs. Marriott, his widowed cousin, and a leader of fashion. The last letter read thus:—

"MY DEAR ROLF,—

"I shall never forgive you that you have not paid me so much as a flying visit since your return. Considering our close relationship, and the years we spent together when children, I think you have treated me very shabbily."

"However, I am not going to scold you; that would, indeed, be a sorry way of welcoming you back. You cannot think how delighted I am you have secured that secretaryship. Lord Ringrove is my personal friend, and a very good sort of fellow; and you are wise to let the Manor. It is the only way in which you can recoup your losses, and secure the estate for your descendants."

"But when you speak of taking a house here for a matter of two months you are demented. What have I ever done that you should doubt my affection? 'Nothing,' you say."

"Well, then, for the present, let my home be yours. You and Yolande, with that dear, unselfish soul, Ada Rance, shall pay me a visit, and at the end of the season it will be time enough to secure a home elsewhere, besides which I can introduce my god-daughter to society."

"You tell me she is beautiful, and beauty is a great power; but I am afraid her mother's sin will spoil her chance of matrimony."

"Excuse me that I speak plainly, and that I advise you to enlighten her ignorance at once. In time she will grow used to the idea, and will know how to meet slights."

"Poor child! She has been sadly neglected, and I blame myself very much for this. Let me do my best now to atone for my sin."

"With love to her and to you,

"Believe me, yours,

"ELSIE MARRIOTT."

"P.S.—(The ladies usual, you see.) Don't trouble about Yolande's outfit. I shall provide that; it is my duty and my privilege."

Mr. Strong went in search of his daughter, to whom he imparted his news, only keeping back her mother's story.

She listened in silence, and he was glad to

see she did not appear overjoyed at the idea of leaving Stowe.

Now the actual parting with her dear old home was so near she was rather saddened than otherwise, and went about touching this or that thing with gentle hands.

The new tenant had decided to accept the services of Mead as lodgekeeper; and although he and his wife hated the idea of performing any duties for the "interloper," as they called him, Miss Rance quickly persuaded them it was for the best, and bade them look forward to the day when the "Master" should return prosperous and happy to his home.

It was a sunny afternoon, early in June, when Mrs. Marriott walked to and fro in her boudoir, as restless as a caged tiger. "I hope," so ran the lady's meditations, "I hope the girl is a prude; for at the least hint of frivolity in her (however innocent) people will revive the past to her hurt. Poor child! I could almost wish her dead."

"Mr. Amory!" announced a servant, and as Mrs. Marriott turned a young fellow of handsome, debonaire appearance lounged into the pretty apartment.

"You, Roy! Sit down and let me give you a cup of tea."

"Thank you; that is exactly what I came for," and he sunk with an air of exhaustion into the easiest chair he could find. "This is better than roasting in the Row," he said, turning a pair of bright blue eyes upon his hostess. "By the way, why is it I find you alone to-day?"

"I am waiting the arrival of my guests. I told you, did I not, that I expected my cousin, his daughter, and her governess to-day?"

"I believe you did. But I forget all about them, or I would not have intruded."

Mrs. Marriott laughed. "I like to have you here, and pray stay with me until the ordeal of meeting them is over. You see, it is sixteen years since Rolf and I met, and the girl I have never seen since her christening."

"How awful to reflect on your neglect," the young fellow said, with a comical look, and ran his fingers through his yellow hair, which was soft and pretty enough to adorn a woman's head. "Well, I'll take compassion on you and stay. And what is the god-daughter's name?"

"Yolande; it is uncommon."

"Uncommonly lovely! She ought to have a face like an angel to match her name."

"She will probably disappoint you."

"Oh, without doubt. I know a girl named Lily, and she bears as much resemblance to that flower as I do to Hercules. She has cheeks the colour of peonies, and hair so deeply and unmistakably red that a bull would take fright at it on first sight—and she is freckled so terribly that you cannot tell what her skin originally was like!"

"You are very severe; but probably when her parents named her they were dwelling upon her resemblance to the *Tiger Lily*."

"Who is severe now, I would like to know?" laughing. Then after a pause, "Miss Strong's mother died young, did she not? I think I've heard the governor say so."

"Yes, she died when Yolande was a mere baby," answered Mrs. Marriott, with averted face.

"Strong cut up awfully rough about his wife's death, didn't he? Bolted from England, and did not turn up for years."

"He returned about three weeks ago."

The noise of carriage wheels attracted Roy's attention. Turning his head he said,—

"Your visitors are already here, so I will make myself scarce."

"Oh, no! Pray stay. Excuse me, I will be with you again in a few moments," and she hurried away to welcome her guests.

Roy stood at the window, and saw first a tall, sombre-looking man step out and give his hand to a little, elderly lady; then a young girl, somewhat above the medium height, and with her hands full of the once famous roses of Stowe. The shadows falling across her

face made "dusky the great amber eyes," and as he looked at her the young man fairly caught his breath with surprise and delight at her beauty.

She stood a moment as though bewildered by her new surroundings; then with a slow, sweet smile, she followed her father and his companion into the house.

A little later Mrs. Marriott joined Roy Amory.

"You saw her, Roy?"

"Yes," he answered, absently. "She is the loveliest creature I have ever seen!"

"And her name suits her admirably, eh? Her voice, too, is as perfect as her face. Now, I must run away. She has no maid, and mine is so stupid. Will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"I shall be glad," he answered, with so much eagerness that she smiled; but when he was gone she went slowly and thoughtfully up to Yolande's room.

"He is quite prepared to fall in love with her; but the question is, would Sir John consent to a marriage between them? Poor child! I am afraid not all her beauty will bring her happiness."

As she entered, Yolande was brushing out the long masses of shining hair, and she turned with a smile to Mrs. Marriott.

"It seems, cousin, we have taken you quite by storm, but I was glad to come. I wished to know one who has been so uniformly kind to my dear father."

Elsie Marriott took the pure, sweet face between her hands, and looked earnestly into the grand, calm eyes.

"I hope you will be very happy here," she said, gently. "I hope you will learn to love me very dearly!"

"I think I do that already," simply; "and I am sure I shall be happy with you."

CHAPTER III.

THE next day Mr. Strong put a cheque for twenty pounds in Mrs. Marriott's hand.

"Do the best you can with it," Elsie. I cannot afford more. You must buy inexpensive goods, as the child's wardrobe is of the scantiest."

"I wish you were less independent; but you will hardly deny me the pleasure and privilege of adding to it a little?"

"You are very kind, but don't spoil Yolande for her future life," and he hurried away to his duties.

Then dressmakers came and displayed fashion plates and all the paraphernalia of a lady's toilet, and Yolande looked on with calm eyes. It was decided she should wear white cashmere on her first appearance; and, despite all Mrs. Marriott's persuasions and liberal offers, she insisted its only trimmings should be Miss Rance's lace.

"What an obstinate puss she is!" said her godmother that night to Mr. Strong; "and she is a bit of a prude, too. She was horrified when I proposed her bodice should be cut in regulation style, and with straps in lieu of sleeves. Her face flushed crimson. 'Oh! cousin,' she said; 'you wouldn't have me disgrace my sex by appearing like those women in the fashion plates.'" I laughed. "Why, Yolande, it is the thing; and if ever you are presented you will be compelled to adopt full dress."

"Undress, you mean," she retorted, sharply, "and I fancy I can well dispense with the honour of presentation."

Mr. Strong smiled.

"Let her alone, Elsie; modesty is not so general as once it was. And, pray, when shall I see her in the much-talked-of gown?"

"At Mrs. Perrin's ball next Tuesday. By the way, Rolf, what do you think of Roy Amory?"

"He seems a nice lad, but he isn't in the least like his father."

"No, Sir John is a bit of a prig," laughing.

"Roy wouldn't be a bad husband for Yolande. He is young, handsome, and will be rich!"

"Elsie! Elsie! What an inveterate match-maker you are! Do you suppose," sadly, "a man like John Amory would consent to a marriage between his only son and my poor little girl?"

Mrs. Marriott was silent. She, too, had fears for Yolande, but she would not confess this, and after awhile she said,—

"The girl is so beautiful, so winning in ways and speech, that she can woo any man to espouse her cause."

"So could her mother; and that may be counted rather against than for her."

The eventful Tuesday arrived, and Yolande dressed for her first ball. She was very calm outwardly, but her heart throbbed with excitement, and a faint dread at the prospect of meeting many strangers.

"I hope I shall acquit myself decently," she said to Miss Rance, who was assisting her with her toilet. "How different it will be; dancing in a crowded room to our mild exercise at home. I'm afraid I shall utterly break down in the quadrille, and as for the Lancers—well, I must sit them out."

"Oh! a good partner will help you through, and you will quickly learn all you need. Oh! my dear! how beautiful you look!" clasping her hands in ecstasy.

Yolande flushed slightly as she regarded her reflection in the pier-glass, and, smiling at her companion's delights prepared to leave the room, when a maid appeared bearing a beautiful bouquet of stephanotis, in the centre of which burned a vivid crimson rose.

"From my father!" she said, in a tender tone, but the maid answered, quickly,—

"I beg your pardon, miss; no. Mr. Amory's servant brought them."

The flush on the sweet young face deepened. She had seen Roy very often since she came to town, and could not be blind to his growing interest in her. She trembled with a new, strange pleasure, and the grand eyes grew almost tender as they rested on the beautiful blossoms she carried. There was a tiny slip of paper placed between the outer row and the lace surrounding it.

"With best wishes, R. A."

Miss Rance had preceded her, and now she detached the slip of paper and placed it in her desk, then went slowly downstairs to meet her father and Mrs. Marriott.

The former looked at her in astonishment; she was so lovely in her new guise. It is not true that "beauty unadorned is adorned the most?" A pretty woman grows positively lovely when tastefully dressed, and a plain one almost pretty.

The dress was wholly white and cut square at the throat, the space being filled with lace; the sleeves descended to the elbows, and lace fell in cascades almost to the shapely wrists.

She wore no ornaments, and seen thus was a beautiful type of the English girl as she should be, but as unfortunately she is not often.

"Shall I pass muster, father?" she asked, with a smile.

"You are looking very well, my dear!" and he led her to the carriage.

They reached Mrs. Perrin's in a few moments, and that pleasant little lady welcomed them cordially.

"I am proud to think you will make your debut at my house," she said to Yolande, and added with a smile, "Here is Mr. Amory; he has been waiting near the door from the moment he arrived."

She passed on to meet other guests, and Roy advanced a little diffidently. He spoke a few words to Mrs. Marriott and Mr. Strong, then gave his arm to Yolande.

"Thank you so much for carrying my flowers," he said, in a low tone.

"They are very beautiful, Mr. Amory, and I cannot tell you how proud I am of them," she answered, quietly, and the grand calm eyes met his a moment, then she looked around

at the gaily-dressed women and their laughing, chatting partners.

She blushed brightly as curious eyes were turned on her, and thought that Mayfair manners were scarcely in advance of country ways. She did not know that folks were saying amongst themselves,—

"That woman's daughter! Great heavens, what is Mrs. Marriott about! Lovely, yes, but she will never make any sensation—her parentage is too well known."

"Let me see your tablets," Roy was saying, and she gave the little pink and silver arrangement into his hand.

"You will let me take this vase and a mazurka," he said, with an air of conviction. "I'm not going to be put off with quadrilles and those sort of things."

"Oh," she answered, with a comical little moue, "I hoped you would ask only for them; I am so ignorant of them."

"Then I'll sacrifice myself and ask for one; the rest we'll sit out together."

"I am afraid that would not do," she said, simply, and he was obliged to agree with her decision, knowing that Mrs. Grundy must not be outraged.

Yolande's tablets were very quickly filled, and as she floated round with this or that partner men turned to watch the lithe, beautiful figure, the superb face lit up by those grand, wonderful eyes.

"What a pity her mother made such a slip," said a gentleman to his partner.

"She was a dreadful woman! I wonder the girl has the audacity to appear in select society."

"Perhaps she does not know the story! And after all Mrs. Strong was no worse than a great many others who live and die in the odour of sanctity."

The lady was silenced, but she, in common with others, watched Yolande jealously, trying to find some flaw in her conduct, but failed; for ignorant as she was of the world she had all the instincts of a gentlewoman, and was not likely to shock the most fastidious taste.

After their valse Roy led her away to the conservatory, where he chose the most secluded seat, and determined to have "five minutes' bliss" before returning to "that Babel!"

He sat down beside her, his fair, young face eager and flushed, his blue eyes bright with passion, for already the boy told himself he loved Yolande, and would have no other woman for his wife. He was of age and competent to choose for himself, he said, and Sir John must be proud and pleased with his choice.

"You are having a good time?" he said, bending over the girl in a loverlike way.

"Oh, yes! but the men are so stupid; they talk such nonsense, pay such fulsome compliments that once or twice I have been very angry."

"And snubbed them for their pains?" laughing gleefully. "Good girl! Go on snubbing, and I shall soon have you all to myself. At the risk of being called stupid I must tell you you are far and away the loveliest girl here to-night!"

A faint pink stole over her throat and face, and she averted her head. He noticed, too, the slender hands resting on her lap trembled slightly.

"Yolande! I may call you Yolande?—at least when we are alone. You don't know how happy you have made me to-night!"

She rose suddenly; afraid of the wild joy stirring her heart.

"Do you think we ought to stay here?" she asked, hurriedly. "I am so ignorant of your ways."

"Oh! it's all right," contentedly. "Pray don't go yet. I've something to tell you. If you lived to be a hundred years old and were always fawn you could never have a prettier compliment paid you than that little speech of Hawley's I overheard. Aren't you curious?"

"Just a little," smiling. "Please don't keep me in suspense?"

"Well, it was just as that big guardsman was taking you back to Mrs. Marriott. The fellow with Hawley said, 'Miss Strong is undoubtedly the loveliest girl here. She reminds me of a picture I once saw of Ophelia.' 'I think I know it,' Hawley answered. 'Yes, she is a veritable 'Rose of May.' Then I moved off. Now confess you are elated."

"I like to please," she answered, simply, "but it is not nice to be discussed so freely."

"Oh! most girls like it. Perhaps you won't mind so much when you are more used to society, although I hope I shall never see any change in you."

"I have come to claim my dance, Miss Strong," said a manly voice, and Yolande found herself led away by the "big guardsman," much to Roy's chagrin.

After that night she was seen everywhere; in the Row, at theatre, concert, garden party, at ball and *soirée*, until man grew to watch for her coming, and she had a little court of admirers wherever she went.

But she was unchanged; she never seemed elated or flattered by their attentions or pretty speeches. The grand, calm eyes never grew tender as she listened; her face did not take one added shade of colour, unless, indeed, the man was Roy Amory.

She was not without lovers; had she chosen she could have worn the strawberry leaves, but the suitor was old and vicious, and she shrank from him with loathing.

Her father, watching, loved her more dearly as the summer days sped by, and Mrs. Marriott had but one complaint to make,—

"She was too cold, too unconscious of her power."

It was July, and so sultry that Mrs. Marriott had foresworn the usual drive, much to Yolande's pleasure. There was a beautiful garden attached to her cousin's house, shut out from curious eyes by a high stone wall, and here Yolande proposed to spend the long afternoon. She was sitting under some elms in a rocking chair, pretending to read, when Roy entered the garden from behind her; she heard his step, and slightly turned her head.

"So you have braved the heat, run the risk of a sunstroke, merely to say goodbye to me?" she said, quietly.

The young man flung himself down on the grass at her feet.

"So you are really going to-morrow?" he asked, disconsolately. "I think it is awfully selfish of Mr. Strong to insist on carrying you to Redcroft."

"You forget," gently, "that duty takes him there, and where he goes I go too."

"But you can't always do that," eagerly. "You'll be getting married one day, and will have to stay at home with your husband."

"I will wait until such a time comes before I give the matter much thought," she answered, laughing and blushing.

"By Jove! you had better think of it at once, Yolande!" he cried, boyishly. "It isn't likely the Rose of May will be left long ungathered."

She sat silent, and he noticed she had grown pale. He reached up and possessed himself of her hands.

"Yolande," he said, in a queer, uncertain voice, "don't you know I love you? Haven't I been your shadow since the day we first met? Oh! my dear, my queen! I haven't half as much as some fellows to offer you; but I can give you all my love, all my heart, and I think, I am sure, I could make you happy. What will you say to me, sweetheart?"

He leaned his cheek upon her trembling hands and waited, breathless, for her answer.

"You have not known me long," she breathed rather than said, "and I am very poor."

He laughed out joyously.

"I have enough for both, Yolande. What other objection have you to me? Can't you say, 'I love you a little, Roy?'"

"No, for that would not be true. I love

you with all my heart," and then she was caught close, and his lips were laid passionately upon hers, his arms held her fast.

Speech was impossible in those first few moments of joy. She simply lay in his embrace, scarcely breathing, scarcely thinking, because her heart was so stirred with love for him.

Roy was the first to recover his composure.

"I guess I shall soon follow you to Redcroft," he said, feasting his eyes on her dainty beauty. "Oh, my sweetheart! my queen! I was ever a fellow so happy as I! Of course I shall tell Mr. Strong at the earliest opportunity, and then I must see the governor, and beg for an early marriage."

She interrupted him.

"We are both so young—we can wait."

"There's nothing like taking time by the forelock," joyously, "and marriage steadies a fellow wonderfully. I shall be a model husband!"

The beautiful tender eyes which met his were full of love and joy, and he could not guess that after to-day the sunlight would leave her face, the deep content die out of her voice; that soon they would be parted for weary weeks and months. The years before him seemed so glad and fair, and youth is ever hopeful.

They sat in the garden until Mrs. Marriott summoned them to five o'clock tea, and then there was such a marked change in their demeanour that the astute lady guessed the truth.

"I shall call on Mr. Strong to-night," he said, at parting.

"Very well, Roy. I hope, dear, your father will approve."

CHAPTER IV.

THAT night Roy was closeted for a long time with Mr. Strong, and when he left the study in search of Yolande his face was very pale and grave, for he had been listening to the story of Allyn Strong's sin, and there was a great dread in his heart that Sir John would refuse to sanction his engagement.

Mr. Strong had been very kind in his manner, but he had said firmly,—

"Until your father has consented to your wishes, you must consider Yolande free. It will not do for you to displease him; the estates are not entailed, and you are absolutely penniless if he chooses."

"I know," moodily; "but you might tell me to hope, and if the worst comes, why, I can earn my own livelihood in some fashion."

"My boy," very kindly, "you are so young as scarcely to know your own wishes, and much as you love Yolande now, the day would come when you would repent the sacrifice you made for her. Neither will I have her enter a family where she is not welcome. There, say no more, this has been a trying interview to me; but I would not have you marry Yolande in ignorance of the fact, even if that were possible."

So, sick at heart, with the dread of losing "his Rose of May," Roy went out.

He knew he should find her in the garden; he caught the faint glimmer of light robes, heard the sweet voice softly singing,—

"What are we waiting for, O my heart?"

Kiss me straight on the brows and part,

Again, again—my heart! my heart!

What are we waiting for, you and I?

A pleading look, a stifled cry,

Good-bye for ever, good-bye, good-bye."

He wished she had been singing any song save this; it seemed to his distraught mind a confirmation of his fears, and an omen of ill. He called her name softly, and she, turning swiftly, came forward with outstretched hand.

Her eyes were radiant, and she had never been so beautiful, so dear as now, when he feared to lose her.

He drew her close to his side.

"You don't ask me for my news, sweetheart?" he said, and struck by the gravity of his voice, she said quickly and tremulously,—

"Is father angry—has he denied you your wish?"

"No, he has consented, on condition that my father does the same."

"And you think he will not?" with a woman's quick intuition. "Is that it, Roy? I know I am poor, but at least my birth is as good as your own, and there is no stain upon our name."

His heart ached for her, as she spoke so proudly, with head erect, and flashing eyes.

"Why should Sir John refuse?"

"My darling! it was your father's idea, not mine; and it is well to be prepared."

She was not infected by his fear, it seemed so unfounded to her in her ignorance, and she asked quite calmly,—

"Supposing Sir John should object, what would you do?"

"Give up all, if need were, for you, my darling! Do you think that, having won you, I would ever let you go? I am young and strong, and should be proud and glad to work for you."

In the clear moonlight his face looked stern and aged, and with a sudden realization that his dread was very great, she clung to him passionately.

But the next moment she lifted her head and smiled up at him.

"We are meeting trouble half way, dear! To-morrow, when you have seen your father, you will smile over your fears."

"To-morrow," he said, gloomily, "we shall be parted—you at Redcroft, I at Qaydon."

"A distance of eighty miles—what is it? A mere trifle, and you said you would follow us soon."

"As I will! To day is Tuesday; on Friday (at the very latest) you shall see me."

Mrs. Marriott called to Yolande that the dew was falling heavily, and it was late.

"Come in, child, you have a long journey before you. Roy, what a selfish boy you are!"

"We are coming presently," he answered, and drew Yolande into the darkest shadows.

"My darling! my darling! good-bye! Wish me god-speed? No, I shall not come in again; I am not in a fit mood for society. Let us say good-bye here, and part."

He held her close. She heard his breath come hard and fast, felt the mad beating of his heart against her side, and in a sudden burst of passion, threw her arms about his neck.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she said, tenderly. "Whatever comes, we will never be false each to the other. Kiss me, Roy, and remember always that all my heart is yours—all my life!"

There, under the ancient elms, they parted, and when again they met the cruel blow Roy so dreaded had fallen, and all the light had gone from her eyes.

The next morning Mr. Strong and Yolande, together with Miss Rance, went down to Redcroft, a pretty watering-place where Lord Ringrove had a bijou house.

Mr. Strong had engaged a cottage just outside the town, and Yolande was delighted with all the arrangements made for her comfort.

She could hardly understand her father's anxiety, or the tender scrutiny to which he subjected her.

"We are more prosperous now," she thought, "and in time we shall go back to the Manor. Why should he be so heavy-hearted?" and she strove by added love and care to lighten his load.

On the Thursday she received a letter from Sir John Amory, which she carried to her room. Her face was flushed, and her heart beat high with hope.

She sat down by the open window, and, breaking the seal, drew out the baronet's letter. It was written in a crabbed hand, and was very short.

"MY DEAR MISS STRONG,—

"As my son utterly refuses to acquaint you with my decision, it devolves upon me to do so. Under no circumstances can I consent to an engagement between you, and if you have Roy's interest at heart, you will at once give him his freedom.—Yours truly,

"JOHN AMORY."

She read it through twice before she fully comprehended its meaning, and then she sat, looking with dazed eyes across the wide expanse of glittering sea, not thinking, scarcely even feeling, her heart being numbed by this great calamity.

Higher and higher the sun rose in the cloudless sky. The little yachts danced over the sunlit waves, and the fishers whistled on the beach below.

Still she sat there, silent and motionless as a statue, holding the open letter in her hand.

At last, alarmed by her long absence, Miss Rance stole upstairs, and entering the room, cried out in terror at the girl's white, stricken face, the dumb anguish in her eyes.

"Oh, my love, my love! what is it?" she whispered, clinging about Yolande, and for answer the girl put the cruel letter into her hands.

The little governess was fiercely indignant. She exhausted her whole stock of invectives (it was not large) upon Sir John, and strove by every means in her power to rouse Yolande from her stony calm.

At last the girl spoke. Was that her voice, so burdened and hoarse with pain? Were those tuneless tones hers? Where was their music and their gladness?

The little woman at her feet shivered.

"What does he mean? Is there anything beside my poverty he can urge against me? Is there any stain upon my name? Tell me quickly and truly."

"There is none," cried the other weeping, and in her heart she prayed, "Heaven forgive me the lie."

Her tears stirred Yolande in a measure. She seemed to be aroused from her apathy. Turning to Miss Rance she said,—

"Must I give him up? Is there nothing else left me to do? Oh! why does he not come or write? Tell me what I am to do; you are wiser than I."

"My dear! How shall I advise you? Wait a little; Roy will certainly come."

Yolande sat twisting her hands together, like one in great bodily pain. Then she rose.

"At first," she said, in hard tones, "I did not understand my grief—it was so sudden, so unexpected. It is rushing upon me now, and, oh! how shall I bear it? I must be alone. I want to think, to see plainly what is best for me to do. I—I want to rest for his good. I am going out, and if I am away for hours you must not be anxious. You know when I was a little girl I always fought out my troubles alone."

She began to dress quietly, and without any visible tremor; and only the pallor of her face, the deep shadows in her tawny eyes, gave any hint of woe.

"My dear, I am afraid Mr. Strong will not approve of you walking alone here?"

"When he knows all he will not blame me," Yolande answered, with a faint smile; "he will say this is an exceptional case."

She kissed the timid little woman, and went out, downstairs and through the sweet, old-fashioned garden, and towards the beach. The fishermen watched the lithe, *velte* figure with admiring eyes, and wondered that the "lovely lady at the cottage" had no greeting for them. She walked like one in a sleep, her grand eyes looking steadily before her, her face white and set, her lips compressed. Hour after hour she spent roaming along the rocky coast, fighting bravely with her pain, praying earnestly that she might see how best to serve her lover. She was conscious neither of hunger nor fatigue; she had no thought that was not wholly Roy's, no prayer that did not breathe his name.

It was almost seven o'clock when she reached home, and suddenly grown faint with fasting and long walking, she tottered wearily up the garden path. Her father met her in the porch, and one glance at his face told her he knew all. He drew her gently in.

"Yolande, what will you do?" he asked.

"I shall do what is best for Roy, father. If he wishes for his freedom I will give it him."

"But is not? and I fancy he will not lightly let you go."

"If he holds me to my word I shall remain faithful to him," she said, in the same quiet way. "I will cling to him through all, but I will not marry him without Sir John's consent, for that would be to ruin him."

"And you do not love him well enough to share poverty with him?"

"Oh, yes, yes! I am not afraid of hardship for myself, but he has never known what it is to lack any good thing. Father," breaking into a little sob, despite all her bravery, "father, if I do not marry Roy I shall be Yolande Strong all my life."

Looking into her beautiful eyes he could not doubt her truth or her powers of endurance. Steeping and kissing her tenderly he said,—

"Hope on, my darling. Even Sir John may not prove so harsh as he appears, and Roy is sure to write."

She was very quiet all that evening, but gave no sign of the pain and fear tearing at her heart, and Mr. Strong wondered at her self-control and courage. He was beginning to understand her nature better now, more truly to gauge its depths, but he had expected many tears and laments, not yet knowing how brave and unselfish the girl was.

She spent the next day in watching for a letter from Roy, but none came, and towards evening even her courage began to fail her, and afraid of breaking down she went into the garden, where at least she would be unmolested and unnoticed.

It was growing dusk now. Overhead the stars were shining, and the waves crept up gently to the overhanging cliffs. She looked down on the silver track made by the moonlight, and saw the tossing skiffs as one who gazes with unseeing eyes. She was conscious of nothing but her pain, and the dread that Roy had failed her. Ah! how she loved him! This fear of parting had shown her all he was to her, had revealed the deepest depths of her heart, and she shrank back afraid of the revelation.

There was a step outside the garden boundaries. What of that? Why should she care to look at any passer-by? It was not Roy, he tread so lightly, always "as though his heart were a feather." Nearer and nearer; now the steps halted at the gate, and a voice said,—

"Yolande!"

With a great cry she rushed to him, and threw her arms about his neck.

"Oh, my love! my love! you have come at last."

He sank upon a seat, drawing her down beside him, and looking into his face she forgot her own woe. All the brightness and colouring, delicate as a woman's, had gone from it. It was white and drawn with repressed pain; there were hollows under the bonny blue eyes, and the lips were set in a straight, hard line.

"My dear boy, how you have suffered!" Yolande said in an uncertain voice, "and for my sake! Oh! my dear, although it breaks my heart to say it, let me tell you now that if you wish your freedom it is yours now and unreservedly!"

He broke out fiercely,—

"That is what I do not wish! What I will not take! Yolande, are you afraid of poverty with me? Oh! my darling! my beautiful darling! if you consent to share my lot I have nothing to offer you but love. But I will work day and night for you. I will esteem no labour too great for you. I can bear any and everything save estrangement from you."

How handsome and loyal he looked! How all her soul was moved by the passion in his voice. She clung to him, not weeping, nor moaning, knowing well how her tears would distress him.

"Roy! you have not made the parting final with your father? The breach is not yet beyond healing?"

"We cannot meet as friends unless I promise to behave like a brute to you. I am still his heir until I crown my iniquities by marrying you," he answered moodily.

"My darling! I am of age; I can please myself. Let us ask Mr. Strong's permission to an early wedding. Let us begin life together now."

"Father would not consent to such an arrangement; nor will I, for to do that would ruin you. Oh, Roy! do not think I am afraid of poverty. Have I not always been poor? I am afraid to hurt you. We are so young we can wait, and perhaps when Sir John sees how loyal we are—how nothing can change our mutual love—he will relent."

"He will never do that," savagely; "he is as obstinate as a mule."

"Why should he be so angry with us?" wistfully. "Is it only because we are poor?"

He dared not look into her dear eyes as he answered,—

"He had other views for me."

Please Heaven, she should never learn the secret her father so jealously guarded from him, and he began to urge her passionately to consent to a hasty marriage.

"No; no," she said tenderly, "for my sake you shall not lose your heritage, your father's love. Let us be patient, dear! A little while—"

"Patient!" he cried; "who would be patient under such injustice? What man would consent to have his life mapped out for him; his bride chosen for him? I can't, and won't! I mean to be true to myself and to you, my girl, come what may!" His strong, young voice shook with emotion, "Somewhere I'll find work, somehow I will get you a home! Only be true; it is all I ask, sweetheart wife."

She laid her hands upon his shoulders, and looked fully into his eyes.

"As I love you now I will love you always. I will wait years if need be for you, heartening myself with the thought that one day we shall meet never to part again! Now, try and tell me, Roy, what you purpose doing?"

"Well, having failed to win you to my wish, there is only one thing left me to do. I shall emigrate. In this under-headed old country I should be a complete failure. I don't know enough to earn fifteen shillings a week as clerk. No; I will go where muscle is more than brain, and courage and determination meet their reward."

She hid her face upon his breast, her courage suddenly failing her.

"Roy! Roy! she cried, "how shall I bear it? So far away—so out from all who love you! Oh, Heaven! I wish we had never met, for I am making you an exile, an outcast; and how shall my love atone to you for all you lose?"

She was sobbing wildly, and he was too miserable to offer any comfort. He could only kiss her passionately and call her by endearing names, and at last he touched the right chord.

"For my sake, darling, be brave!"

She fought with and conquered her passion, and, rising, they stood face to face, looking miserably into each other's eyes; the parting was so near, and it would be long before they met again. What wonder their hearts failed them? What wonder that the young man was shaken to the soul? A week hence, home, friends, sweetheart, would be left behind, and he would go alone to seek his fortune.

"You will see my father?" Yolande whispered, but he shook his head.

"Tell him all; but I am unfit for any company to-night. Oh, Heaven! how can I leave you? Sweetheart, be true; if you were false I would go headlong to ruin. I would choose the quickest way to the devil!"

"I shall be true," she said, scarcely above a whisper. "Kiss me, dear heart, and go!" He caught her close; he kissed her madly again and again; then, with a groan, tore himself away, and she sank upon the grass, sobbing.

"Come back, come back! Oh! my darling! oh! my darling! my heart is broken!"

CHAPTER V.

THREE years have passed since that agonised parting between the lovers, and many changes have taken place since then.

Mr. Strong has obtained an lucrative appointment under Government, and Yolande is known as a great heiress.

Just six months after Roy sailed for Australia a letter of entreaty for forgiveness reached her father. It was written by his false friend, Ludwig Hargrave, who lay at the point of death in a little Indian village. It said, too, that the writer had amassed a fortune, and as he had no living relations he prayed Strong to accept it in trust for his daughter, as a peace offering.

So she was rich beyond her desire; the mortgage on the Manor was paid to the full, the old place had undergone innumerable repairs, and was once more in the possession of her father.

She had been glad at heart when this fortune came so mysteriously to her, for she thought, "Now Sir John will consent to our marriage," but she was bitterly mistaken. Her wealth seemed rather to rouse the old man to greater opposition, and she wondered miserably why this should be. She heard often from Roy, who spoke hopefully of the future, and promised soon to return. "And then," he wrote, "if the governor is still obstinate we must please ourselves. Surely you will not spurn my life? I am getting on famously, am developing quite a genius for farming, and like roughing is a bit. My darling! how will you bear transplanting to such scenes as these? And you an heiress! oh, yes, and it is very well to say, 'all I have is yours.' Until I can give you at least a comfortable house I shall not press for marriage. The man who can contentedly live upon his wife is a cur!"

So Yolande had had three seasons in town, and, despite her mother's history, had been courted and flattered, had won men's hearts unwittingly to herself. But she was true to the gallant lover so far away. She never gave a word or a smile to any man that the vainest could misconstrue; she was courteous and kindly—no more. Her beauty had a shadow upon it, a shadow of sorrow and patience, but it served only to draw men more fondly towards her.

It was a glorious July day, and she sat alone in the study, her favourite room. She had just been reading Roy's last letter, and it lay open upon her lap.

"Oh, love; my love! come to me," was her heart's prayer. "I am weary of watching and waiting, of wearing out my days alone!"

"Sir John Amory," announced a servant, and, hastily hiding the letter, she rose to meet Roy's father, a bright flush on her lovely face, a great hope in her heart.

She saw a man of some sixty years, erect, tall, still handsome, but very haggard; he looked critically at her a moment with his stern, black eyes, then said,—

"I have the honour to address Miss Strong?"

She bowed, and began to tremble, his tone being anything but reassuring.

"Pray be seated, as I fear I must ask your attention for some length of time."

She obeyed, and sat opposite to him, in the full light of the July morning; so lovely, so young, surely he would not have the conscience wantonly to wound her.

"I believe," he said, after a slight pause,

"you are still in correspondence with my son."

"Mr. Amory and I are still engaged," with a quiet dignity worthy a queen.

"Along engagement usually ends in nothing. Don't you think it would be wiser to give him his freedom, and transfer your affection to some other admirer?"

The grand eyes flashed a look of superb scorn at him, but she still maintained her quiet manner.

"Mr. Amory neither asks nor desires his freedom, and I shall marry him as soon as he has prepared a home for me!"

"Despite my opposition? You do well to condemn him to poverty and exile."

"He need endure neither," coldly. "I am not the penniless girl I was when we first met, and all that I have is his. I owe him all I have for his love and fidelity."

Sir John listened with flushed, angry face and stormy eyes.

"Is it nothing to you, that for your sake he will lose the old home, where the Amorys have lived for generations?"

"Indeed it is, Sir John. It is bitter pain and grief to me to reflect on his father's harshness and injustice. He was and is a loving son; he would have pleased you in everything but this one thing. You have no right to seek to control his choice of a wife. What do you urge against me? Am I not well-born? Am I not wealthy and fitted by education to share his honours, Sir John?" and now her voice grew wistful. "Why do you hate me?"

She had risen and stood, tall and fair before him, with such pain and entreaty in her eyes that one would have thought he could not strike the blow he meditated.

"Why do I hate you?" contemptuously.

"I neither hate nor love you; but my son ceases to be my son on the day he weds himself to shame. I am an old man; I may not have long to live. Set him free, that I may see him home again! Other men will love you, for you are fair; other men will be willing to forget your name is stained."

"My name stained!" she said, in low, incredulous tones. "My name! Sir John, you must prove your rash assertion. If it is so, your son is free."

"Is it possible you do not know?" uncomfortably. "Has no one told you?"

"Speak plainly. I do not like riddles, and I am utterly ignorant of your meaning. But be careful what you say. My father is an honourable man."

"It is not of your father I speak, but your mother."

The hot blood flamed to her face.

"She is dead, and should be beyond calumny. Oh! how dare you come here with stories you cannot prove? She died young, and away from home; her loss well-nigh broke my father's heart."

"And crushed his pride?" supplemented Sir John. "She betrayed him, and eloped with his friend, Ludwig Hargrave."

Yolande was white to the lips now with passion.

"It's a lie!" she cried; "if for one moment I were a man you should repent your words. Go!"

"Not yet, Miss Strong! It appears it is my painful duty to tell you a shameful story. I can pity you now, knowing your ignorance. You were two years old when your mother left home and husband for dishonour and exile. Your father pursued the guilty lovers, but never overtook them. Allyn Strong was killed by a fall on the Alps, her paramour escaped. Go to your father and ask him if every word I say is not true?"

She listened with dilated eyes, her slender hands were pressed to her white throat, and she shivered as if with cold, then suddenly she swayed and fell against the wall, looking like one dead.

Sir John sprang to her side.

"Don't take it so terribly hard," and he

would have supported her, but she flashed upon him fiercely.

"Keep off! Do not touch me!" she said, in an awful voice. "Give me time—time to realise this awful thing!"

A heavy silence fell upon them, and Sir John thought of ringing for assistance, seeing that Yolande still remained leaning there with that terrible look of agony frozen on her lovely face, but at last she spoke.

"Your son is free. Oh! yes! You may tell him he is free! Now you have conquered, be content and leave me alone with my misery. You should be a happy man, Sir John, seeing you have blighted a young girl's life, destroyed all her faith in, and reverence for, the mother who has been always as an angel to her. Mr. Amory will thank you for your zeal—as I cannot."

He tried to speak, but by a gesture Yolande forbade him, and feeling hardly so easy in his mind as he could wish, he went out.

Then the unhappy girl crept to the study, hardly knowing how she went. A great horror filled her heart; instinctively she felt Sir John's story was true, and now read aright her father's long absence, and strange reluctance to speak of his wife. She dragged herself across the room—how weary her limbs had suddenly grown! and stood with lifted eyes and looked hands, gazing into the fair, false face, which had wrought such ruin.

"Mother!" she wailed. "Oh! my mother! How could you do this great evil? How could you break his heart, and dower me with shame? Your child! Oh, Heaven! Your child! I have scorned women such as you; but how shall I scorn you who gave me life? Oh! mother! mother! mother! You should have killed me before you fled!" and with a cry of exceeding anguish she sank prone upon the floor, hiding her stricken face upon her arms.

"I shall never be glad again! Never hold up my head any more! And I have been so proud of my name. Mother, I so loved you! Oh! Roy! Roy! What will you say when you know all the shameful truth?"

Her tears fell fast now, blinding her with their bitter flow. She had no longer any care or wish to live; she only longed to be hidden "out of the world's way, out of the light!"

Lying there, she wondered, dully, if Roy would ever seek her; or if he, too, would drift away from her as all good things seemed drifting, and thought unconsciously, in the words of a great poet,—

"Never any more while I live,
Need I hope to see his face, as before."

Ah! How could she live under the knowledge that she was changed; the bonny boyish lover who had been so ready to sacrifice all for her sake! And what is life without love?

"I know not how it is with men,
For women there is no good of life but love—but love."

The golden morning wore slowly on, and still the girl lay there, her proud head brought low, and still the pitiless, fair face smiled down upon her.

Mr. Strong came into luncheon, wondering that Yolande did not meet him in the porch.

"Where is the child?" he asked Miss Rance.

"In the study. She has been alone ever since Sir John Amory left. I knocked, but she would not give me permission to enter. I am afraid—" and there she paused, looking wistfully into the man's dark face.

"You are afraid he has told her the truth?" he said, through his clenched teeth. "Ah! the poor child! He might have shown her mercy."

He hastened to the study, and gently opening the door looked in.

In a moment he was kneeling beside the beautiful, prostrate figure.

With infinite tenderness he lifted her in his

strong arms, and drew her tear-disfigured face upon his breast.

Ah! the shame and anguish in her lovely eyes. The man's heart ached bitterly for her, as he stooped and kissed the tremulous mouth.

"Father! father!" she cried, clinging to him wildly. "Say it is not true! Oh! take this dreadful fear from me! Oh! Heaven! You do not answer!" And with a pathetic gesture of despair she covered her face.

"My darling, listen! It has been the endeavour of my life to keep this thing from you. Perhaps I was wrong; but I wanted you to have some gladness, some pleasure, whilst it was in my power to give it. And Yolande, could I say to you of the woman I loved: 'She was false to the core! She was more guilty than the poor wretches one meets upon the street! She was my wife! Your mother!' Oh! merciful Heaven! I wonder now that her flight did not rob me of my reason."

Yolande listened in utter silence, and he felt her quiver in his embrace.

"Daughter; was not my grief harder to bear than yours? Think how many years I have suffered alone, making no moan, no outcry! Cannot you be brave now, for my sake?"

A faint flush stole over her face and throat. She dashed aside her tears.

"My darling! my darling! I will try!" she said, in a low, unsteady voice. "Let me begin at once. And now that I know how sorely you have suffered—how terribly you need consolation—it may be—it may be, I shall not find it hard to bear my own burden."

She rose as she spoke; smoothed down the folds of her dress, and turned as if to go, but paused on the threshold, "Dear, does Roy know?"

"Yes. I told him all the night he asked for you."

Her beautiful face was suddenly transfigured by joy.

"And he loved me still? He gave up all for me? Oh, father! father! I can bear anything now."

He drew her hand in his arm, and led her out, glancing back once at his wife's portrait, and in his heart he almost cursed her for the woe she had brought their child.

Beyond being very subdued in her manner, there was no very visible change in Yolande that day, and only Rolf Strong guessed how deep her wound was.

In the evening he walked down to the village, where he found a most unusual stir, and on inquiring the cause he learned the six o'clock passenger and a goods' train had collided about a mile up the line, and it was feared many were mortally injured.

"They're bringin' the poor critters up as fast as they can. And the inn's about full, sir. One or two o' us can accommodate some o' them. But there's Sir John Amory, the gent what came down this mornin', and they don't know where to put him. His servant was stone dead when they took him up; and Sir John have got a broken leg."

Rolf Strong stood silent a moment, fighting with himself.

This man had wrecked Yolande's happiness. Could he offer him any kindness—any hospitality?

Let him lie in misery. What was his pain compared with that young girl's?

But under all his harshness he had a good heart, and after awhile he said,—

"Let Sir John be brought up to the Manor. I know him; and any others for whom accommodation cannot be found in the village. I will prepare the ladies for their arrival."

There was a great bustle amongst the servants when they heard the news, and soon all were actively engaged (under the superintendence of Miss Rance and Yolande) preparing beds for the sufferers.

There were only two, however—Sir John, and a poor little maid on her way to her

"first place." And when she was comfortably installed in her room, Yolande stole in to see her enemy.

His leg had been set, but the pain made him wakeful, and as she entered he turned his head restlessly upon his pillows.

"You! I suppose you think this is punishment for my conduct to you?"

"I think nothing but that you are an invalid, and I your nurse," coldly.

CHAPTER VI.

For many days Sir John was delirious; the little maid, Ann Judd, was able to sit up before consciousness returned to him.

Yolande and Miss Rance were unremitting in their attentions to the invalids, and Mr. Strong placed no restriction upon his daughter, feeling it was best that every hour of her day should be filled.

He wrote to Roy, telling him of his father's visit and accident, and giving him his freedom. "Yolande will write you good-bye when she has learned to think more calmly of her changed prospects."

It was now the end of July, and Sir John, weak as a child, and very querulous, lay on his bed, listening to the sighing of the trees as they swayed to and fro before his window.

Suddenly Yolande's voice sounded in the adjoining room. She was reading to Ann Judd, and he strained his ears to catch her words.

What a mellow voice she had. How musical its cadences were! Why did she not amuse him thus? If she read to him at all she chose such articles from newspapers as she thought would interest him. But for her other patient's edification she read "Idylls of the King," and such books as "David Copperfield," or "Jane Eyre."

He stirred impatiently, and rang the bell beside him. Yolande answered his summons quickly and quietly.

"I want my pillows rearranged," he said, ungraciously; and, although she flushed under his tone, she lifted him gently, and smoothed out his pillow with deft hands.

"What is the matter with you? You are whiter and thinner than when I saw you first."

"I have had a great deal to do, Sir John, and very little exercise since then."

"Ugh! You're not a very cheerful companion for a sick-room!"

Just for a moment he thought she would flash into anger, but she controlled herself admirably.

"I am sorry, and will endeavour to be more amusing in future."

"If you mean that, bring your book here and read to me."

"I beg your pardon; I cannot devote myself exclusively to you. It is Ann's turn now; but if you care to listen I will leave her door open."

"Thank you, no!" sharply. "I hate a woman to speak loudly. Come back; I've something to say to you. If you were wise you would affect great consideration for me, as it might soften me towards you."

The flush on her lovely face was deeper now.

"I might be tempted to do so if I had any hope of winning your favour, but I have not. Pray, forget we ever met in any other characters than those of nurse and invalid."

After she was gone he lay thinking of her words and ways, and doing his best to steel his heart against her. But the next day he said, curtly,—

"You are going to the girl in there?"

"Yes."

"You can leave the door open. My eyes ache too badly to allow me to read."

She smiled slightly as she obeyed, and after this it became the custom for her to seat herself midway between the invalids, and read

or sing as they wished. One morning Sir John turned abruptly towards her.

"Why does not your father visit me?" She blushed deeply.

"He accords me his hospitality grudgingly and of necessity, but I will relieve him of my presence as soon as that imbecile doctor will allow me to move. I suppose he resents my conduct to you?"

"I am afraid so. You see, he wished me always to remain in ignorance of the past, and the blow you dealt me was as sudden as it was cruel."

"And you are not inclined to forgive or forget?"

"I will try to forgive, but it is impossible to forget," she answered, sadly.

"And if you have not forgiven me why are you so careful for my comfort?"

"I would do as much for any other creature who was thrown upon me for assistance."

"That isn't very flattering to my vanity," Sir John said, with a short, hard laugh, "but it is at least truthful. Come nearer, Miss Strong. I am going to make an admission which has cost me a struggle with my pride. But for that unfortunate stain upon your name there is no girl I would so much wish to call daughter as yourself."

"As it is, Sir John," wearily, "you regard me as a dangerous person?"

"To a man's peace of mind, yes. I have tried to hate you, and failed. It isn't your beauty that has won my regard, for I have met many lovely women in my life, and I am quite sure it is not your affection or esteem for me," with a wry grimace. "What witchery have you used to bring about such a result? You don't know. Ah, well! Tell your father John Amory wishes to see and thank him for his hospitality."

"You forget, sir, it is given grudgingly and of necessity," with a demure look.

He smiled slightly, and regarded her more kindly than he had hitherto done.

"You are a good girl," he said, almost gently. "Your father should be proud of his treasure. I hope you will be happy some day in a good man's love."

A little bitter smile curved her beautiful mouth.

"You are generous, Sir John. I am unfit to enter your family, but you are willing that I should carry my aham into some other house."

"Just so; it is the way of the world. And, after all, Yolande, you and Roy were mere children at the time of your engagement. If ever you met again you would probably find yourselves disenchanted."

"I think not," with quiet confidence. "We both believe the poet's words, that, as each man has but one soul, so each has but one love."

"And for Roy's sake you will live out your life alone?"

She bowed, and moved to a distance that he might not see the distress on her face, the anguish in her eyes; but he was keener sighted than she believed.

"You have given my son his freedom?"

"I have, believing it to be for his good; but should he find life empty without me, that I am indeed necessary to him, I will hold out no longer. I am wealthy now, and all I have should be his. On the other hand, Sir John, if he feels it wisest and best to forget our mutual vows I shall neither reproach nor remind him of them. In all things I would act for his good."

She went into Ann Judd's room then, not daring to say more lest her courage should fail her; and Sir John lay thinking over her words, and fighting with the pride which was so dominant a feature in his character.

At dusk Mr. Strong visited him. He looked very tall and stalwart standing there in the dim light, and his voice was unnaturally stern and low.

"You sent for me, Amory; what is your business with me?"

"Sit down. You won't? Ah, well, have

your own way. Of course I wanted to thank you for your hospitality and the good nursing I have received."

"Your thanks are due to Miss Strong, not to me," in the same hard tone. "There is no man I am so unwilling to serve as yourself."

"I know it, and it is natural, I suppose. But put yourself in my place. Were Roy your son, would you care for him to marry a girl whose mother was an—"

"Silence! I loved her, and at least for her innocent child's sake leave her sin unspoken. In my blindness I believed that the old saying, 'like mother, like daughter,' would be again verified; but I am ashamed now that I could harbour any suspicion of one so good, so pure as my Yolande. Do you wonder that I am discourteous to you? that all my manhood rises in bitter protest against you?"

"No, I don't," Sir John answered, frankly; "it is very natural. The girl is as good as she is beautiful. I think she could not lie, and would not lend herself to any deceit. And in sending for you I had a purpose. Strong, I will no longer oppose Roy's marriage. Give me pen and paper, and I'll write the young dog to come home. I want my son," and here his voice faltered. But, ashamed of his emotion, he added quickly, "Don't tell the jade I have come to my senses. I want to give her a pleasant surprise."

He wrote a few words hastily, and then, turning to Mr. Strong, said,—

"Read this, and tell me if it suits you:—

"Come home at once, Roy; I am tired of our estrangement. You may marry a sweep's daughter if you like, so long as you celebrate the ceremony in England."

Strong smiled.

"It has one merit: it is very lucid."

The elder man glanced shamefacedly at him.

"Will you shake hands?"

"With all my heart. You have made me eternally your debtor."

After this Sir John began to mend rapidly, and his manner towards Yolande grew so tender and courteous that, against her will, the girl began to regard him with affection.

Sometimes he was tempted to tell her of Roy's coming when he saw how pale and slender she had grown, but always he checked the impulse.

"I'll give her a grand surprise," he thought; "and Roy must be well on his way home."

Yes, each day brought the young man nearer to his native land, but not at all in obedience to Sir John's summons, which, indeed, he had never received, having started for England on receipt of Mr. Strong's letter.

"She shall not ruin her life and mine," he thought. "My beautiful darling! could you think so poorly of me as to fancy I would take my freedom?"

He was very confident that he should win her to listen to his prayer, and, in consequence, was so lighthearted, so full of life, so ready to help one and all that he was speedily a favourite with both passengers and crew.

The wild free life of the past three years had brought into force all his nobler qualities, until in the frank bronzed face one read courage and determination, as well as good nature.

He was broader and more manly, too, in appearance; his voice was hearty and resolute, and his whole frame seemed instinct with strong, jubilant life.

A lover to be proud of? Ah, yes, for since first he looked on Yolande's sweet face no other woman had claimed a thought from him, and for purity of morals he was a very Galahad.

Sir John Amory sat alone in the smoking-room of Amory Hall. He leaned his head upon his hand, and gazed moodily into the fire.

"Can anything have happened to him?" he thought. "It is strange I have had no reply.

Will he come without writing, or is he too angry with me to forgive me?"

The old man looked worn and troubled; and, in his heart, he acknowledged there was small wonder that Roy was bitter against him.

"And yet I acted for his good as I believed. How could I know this girl was so worthy his love? How could I guess her beauty was not her only charm? Oh, my son! oh, my son! if you would but return! Was I ever harsh to you save this once? Did I ever deny you any gift—any wish save this?"

He heard a sound in the hall, and started to his feet. Whose was that step, that ringing voice?

"Roy! Roy!" he said, in a husky whisper. "Oh, thank Heaven, he has come at last."

He rose to meet the long-lost son. He advanced a few steps, then stood with his hands resting on a table, trembling like a weak woman. The door opened, and a tall, bearded young fellow stood before him; so much nobler, so much more self-confident than the youth who had left him in anger, that he could scarcely believe it was Roy he saw.

But the same sunny hair waved above the bronzed brow, the same honest blue eyes were bent upon him, only they were full of pain and condemnation now.

The old man stretched out his hand.

"Roy!" he faltered, "haven't you a word for me?"

The handsome face changed and softened, but he did not attempt to take his father's hand.

"Father," he said. "You think that my coming means I give in to your wishes, that I will consent to resign Yolande. It does not. Knowing all her goodness, all her worth, I will go to her and never leave her until I have wrung a promise from her to marry me at once. Father I loved, and love you; but she is first. For her I am willing to give up all, home, country, friends—"

"Stay, Roy! Why should you give up everything? Marry her if you will, but do not leave me."

Roy looked dazed.

"Do you mean that, at last, you consent?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. Don't humble the old man any more, my boy; he is heartily ashamed of his pig-headedness." And something like a sob shook Sir John's voice, as his son caught and clasped his hand close in his own. And surely it was no shame to Roy that his blue eyes were dimmed with sudden tears.

"Sit down, boy!" said the father, when each had mastered his emotion. "Sit down and let me explain things to you. You know the morning before I met with my accident (it has lamed me for life) I went to Stowe, and saw that poor girl alone. I was very hard with her, believing she knew her mother's shameful story, and was anxious to shelter herself under our ancient and honourable name. I bade her think of the stain upon her, and then realised for the first time that she was really ignorant of the story."

"Well, I was brute enough to tell her it in the bluntest way possible. I shall never forget the look she turned on me; and angry as I was with her for having won your affections, I felt very guilty and uncomfortable as I went from the Manor."

"Then came my accident, and Strong did violence to his own feelings when he received me into his house. She (your Rose of May) nursed me with untiring kindness, but made no attempt to win my favour; showed me no more attention than she gave the poor little maid in the adjoining room. And I can assure you I was very trying. I plagued her in every imaginable way, and tried to imagine faults where there were none."

"To the last I never told her I regretted my conduct, that I had written you to come home and marry the woman of your choice. Roy, can you ever forgive me? Perhaps, when you remember that all I did was (as I believed) for your welfare, you will not find it so very hard."

"Dear father, let there be no talk of forgiveness between us," Roy answered, eagerly. "I was in fault too. I remember some very bitter words I said at our last meeting, and I guess it is a case of 'pot and kettle.' Suppose we agree to bury the past, never by word or look to rake it up." And he stretched out his hand once more.

The next morning, when father and son sat together at breakfast, the former said,—

"I suppose you will be off to Stowe by the eleven-fifteen this morning?"

"Yes, if you can spare me. I confess I shall know no peace until I have seen Yolande."

Sir John sighed.

"I expected nothing else. It is only natural you should be all eagerness to meet her, but it is natural, too, for me to feel some envy of her great, good fortune. You see, she has taken my place, and is first with you now."

"It is an experience most fathers get," gently; "but you must remember there will be two to care for you now in lieu of one. Yolande will not only be easily appeased, but easily won by your kindness."

"I hope so. Well, well, boy, you have waited long enough for your bride. I will not keep you longer from her."

An hour later, Roy looked into his father's room.

"I'm off now, dad! Wish me good luck," with a happy laugh. "If all goes well—and I feel it will—I shall be with you again in a couple of days, and shall not come alone. I'll prevail on Strong and that pretty old maid to share our journey, and we'll have a splendid housewarming. Good-bye, and so he was gone."

He walked to the station, which was but three minutes' journey from Amory Hall, and folks turned to look at the tall, strong figure, the happy, honest face.

A great many did not recognise him as he swung by, and he was too much engrossed with his own thoughts to care who came or went. The words of a poem he had read long ago rang through his brain.

"A girl with eager eyes and yellow hair

Waits me there,

In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul

For the goal,

When the King looked where she looks now,

Breathless, dumb,

Till I come."

"When I do come she will speak not, she will stand

Either hand.

On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace

Of my face,

Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech,

Each on each."

Counted by miles the journey from Amory Hall to Stowe was a mere bagatelle, but by his heart's impatience it exceeded in length even his voyage to the Antipodes.

The train stopped at every station, and it seemed to Roy would never go on again. His fellow-passengers regarded him curiously and amusedly; such impatience pointed him out to them as a probable bridegroom.

But to their disappointment no fair-faced girl met him on the little platform at Stowe, and, indeed, no one appeared to recognise him. So he swung out of the station, and one lady remarked to another,—

"What a splendid looking young fellow! I wonder who he is!"

"And what his errand," laughed the other. "He didn't appear anxious enough for an undeclared suitor. He is probably on a visit to his lady love."

Roy walked quickly along the high road, and came at last to the borders of Stowe Park. The hedges were carefully trimmed now, the fences unbroken; a herd of deer scudded across the grass as he swung open the gate and entered.

He was at once accosted by Mead, and having informed him his errand was to Miss Strong was allowed to pass on, up the broad

drive, now so carefully kept, and through the still fragrant gardens.

A solemn functionary admitted him and led him to one of Yolande's reception-rooms, through the windows of which he could see the Rosery.

And there, her hands full of the last roses of the year, walked Yolande, talking to her father.

He grew sick and faint with sudden excess of joy; his face went white as a frightened woman's, and his heart beat so loudly it seemed to echo through the room. By a fierce effort he conquered his emotion, and stepping through a French window, softly spoke one word.—

"Yolande."

She stood quite still (while Mr. Strong discreetly retired), and her eyes were full of a great, unspeakable gladness. She could not move, she could not speak; she only felt he had returned to her, that neither time nor her own sad story, not even the fact that she had given him his freedom, could quench the love he bore her.

"What, not a word, sweetheart?" he said, smiling down at her, "not one little word? Oh! foolish girl, to believe I would take my freedom."

He drew her into the house, and folding her to his loyal heart, kissed her again and again in a passion of love.

"Oh, Roy! Roy!" she whispered, in a breathless way, "is it really you? I can hardly believe the evidence of my own eyesight. Oh, love! love! this is too good to be true. I shall wake and find—"

"Me a shadow," with a joyous laugh, "and such a substantial one, too! Stand back, sweetheart, and let me look well at you. How pale you have grown, you poor, sweet Rose of May! What a conceited fellow I shall be, for of course pallor, and the shadow I saw on your beauty were alike for me."

Then—well then, there followed the usual low-toned converse, explanations, caresses, and mutual promises of constancy, and they started apart very guiltily when Mr. Strong entered the room.

It wanted but a few days to Yolande's wedding, and Miss Rance sat alone in the breakfast room; her face was very sad, and her pretty eyes were heavy with unshed tears.

"When she is gone I must go too. No one will want me then; there will be nothing for me to do, no reason why I should stay," and she sighed as she spoke.

"Wrong, wrong, all wrong, Ada," said Rolf Strong's voice, and he came and stood beside her. "When Yolande is gone I shall need you more than ever I did, and it will be your duty (as I know it will be your pleasure) to do those little things for me she has been wont to do. There is a great reason why you should stay. I want you for my wife. I will not say I love you as I loved her, who shall henceforth be nameless, but I esteem you, I have a great and true affection for you. Ada, will you stay? Will you trust me?"

She turned to him with a pretty gesture.

"Rolf! Rolf!" she said, and clung about him, weeping for very joy.

At last the faithful love of so many weary years had met its reward.

So there were two weddings in lieu of one, and Yolande dressed her father's bride, despite all her remonstrances.

"He will be proud of you," she said, gently and kissed Ada's cheek. "You are so pretty."

And indeed she was, despite the rapidly whitening hair and the little furrows on the once smooth brow.

Sir John Amery lived many years after his son's marriage—lived to be plagued and idolised by his son's children, lived to learn all the depth and sweetness of a daughter's love; and when at last they laid him to rest no one mourned him more sincerely than she who had once been his *belle noir*.

[THE END.]

FACTS.

CHINAMEN never play billiards, because they can't use their queues.

SHE: "John, what is a coastwise steamer?" He: "One that knows how to keep off the rocks, darling."

ONE of the Western ranches is owned and managed by a woman. She is probably the cow-belle of the West.

A young woman who married a one-legged man says it doesn't take much to make her husband "hopping mad."

"I've been getting points on the carpet trade," said the man who walked on a lot of tacks in his bare feet one night.

ETHEL: "I had quite a notion to marry Mr. Whanky." ELLE: "And why didn't you?" Ethel: "Oh, he didn't ask me."

THE people in the audience who talk continually during the progress of a play should learn the deaf-and-dumb alphabet.

A PHYSICIAN says that a man is shorter during the day than night. That is probably because his wife picks his pockets in the morning.

It's getting to be that in nuptial affairs

The rule of precaution enforces

The wedding certificates being prepared

With a coupon or two for divorces.

WIFE: "A box came to-day, John, addressed to you." Husband: "Did you open it?" Wife: "No." Husband: "Well, I wish you had. It may be one of those infernal machines."

HE: "Handsome woman, that Major Bold's wife; but why will she wear such loud gowns?" She: "Out of consideration to the major, I fancy. He is so shockingly deaf, don't you know?"

A LANCASTER woman has invented "a valuable attachment for a sewing machine." The most valuable attachment for a sewing machine, after all, is a young woman about eighteen years old.

OLD MAN (calling down the stairs to daughter): "Clara!" Daughter: "Yes, papa." OLD MAN: "Ask that young man in the parlour which he prefers for breakfast—milk rolls or Vienna bread."

SEVERAL diamonds were found in a meteorite which fell in the town of Krasnolobodsk, Russia. They will be given to the individuals who are able to pronounce the name of the town. Now is the time to get up clubs.

SYMPATHISING FRIEND (to widow whose husband was blown to pieces by nitro-glycerine): "In what part of the oil country did your husband die, Mrs. Driller?" Widow (sadly): "Poor John died pretty much all over it."

WIFE: "I am so worried about that cough of yours, John, dear." Husband (fondly): "Don't be foolish, little one; it is a mere nothing." Wife: "It may be a mere nothing, John, but I do wish you would see—the insurance man to-day."

"WHAT are you making faces for?" said Mr. McGilder to Mr. Dago. "There ain't anything the matter with that cigar I gave you, is there?" "No, I s'pose not, Flip," replied his friend. "Do I stay here, or do I go out into the yard to die?"

"WHAT did Mrs. B. have on?" asked a lady who had been prevented from attending a reception of her better-half. "Sort of thunder and lightning costume," responded the dreadful man; and when asked what he meant by that, said he could not give details, but it "was loud and shocking."

"I UNDERSTAND you swore off at New Year's, Jack." "I did." "Keeping your resolution?" "Yes, sir." "Going to stick to it?" "I am." "Then perhaps you could lend a fellow a few —." "I swore off lending money too." "You did?" "Yes," and I'm going to stick to that, also." "Oh, all right. S'long." "S'long."

A SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION.—Wife: "What is meant, John, by the phrase 'carrying coals to Newcastle?'" Husband: "It is a metaphor, my dear, showing the doing of something that is unnecessary." "I don't exactly understand. Give me an illustration, a familiar one." "Well, if I was to bring you home a book entitled *How to Talk* that would be carrying coals to Newcastle."

"FATHER," she said, burying her face upon the old man's shoulder, "if I can win the pure, earnest love of an honest, upright man, my life will be full indeed. I ask not for mere wealth. I would love and honour such a man, dear father, if even £25,000 were all that he could rightly call his own." "Noble girl," responded the old man, deeply affected. "I hope you may find him."

"For ten years past," said the new boarder, "my habits have been regular clockwork. I rose on the stroke of six; half an hour later I sat down to breakfast; at seven I was at work; dined at twelve, ate supper at six, and was in bed by nine thirty. At one hearty food, and hadn't a sick day in all that time." "Dear me!" said the dweller, in sympathetic tones. "What were you in for?"

THIS morning a newsboy thrust his head into an hotel waiting-room and yelled: "Heard about the catch made by a policeman last night?" "No!" "No!" "What about it?" and his papers went off like hot cakes. "Catch made by a policeman, eh? Don't believe any such stuff! Thought policemen always fell asleep about the time a catch was on hand." "That's it exactly—he caught a nap!" and the door closed with a bang.

A SELF-DENYING HUSBAND.—"George, dear," said a loving wife, "why don't you smoke the cigars I presented to you on Christmas?" "A pipe is good enough for me, my love. Cigars are too rich for my blood." "But, George, dear, they didn't cost much. I paid only ten shillings for the box." "It was very thoughtful of you to buy them, Mary; but, as I said, a pipe is good enough for me. Your kindness, however, won't be thrown away. The cigars will enable me to do the handsome thing by our friends when they call. They shall have 'em." "But I should like to see you smoke one of them, dear." "Self-denial, my darling, is one of the greatest of human virtues. I deny myself for the pleasure of our friends." "It is noble of you, George, and after all I am proud of your resolution." "Don't make me vain," said the hypocrite, as he went out on the doorstep to enjoy the sixpenny he had purchased coming home.

STARS.

Mr. opinyun ov mankind, as a brilliant success, needs a good deal ov nursing.

No church can expect tew be very successful now days, unless it haz got a good orkesira in it.

Hope iz a thoughtless jade—she often cheats us, but she haz no malice.

When i was yung i thought all money spent was well invested, but as i got older i cypher different.

God makes opportunitys, but man must hunt for them.

Invenshun and judgement are seldom found together.

Amblishun tew shine in everyting iz a sure way tew put a man's kandell all out.

Man's make-up iz ov natur and custom, and i don't kno which ov the two iz the most powerfullest.

A grate brag iz either a phool or a coward, and probably he iz both.

Az long az we are lucky we attribit it tew our smartness; our bad luck we giv the gods credit for.

There iz one person in this world that every body kan tell yu all about, and that iz the next door nabor.

There are people who love too well to ever be jealous.

JOHN BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN has signified her intention of becoming patron of the Working Ladies' Guild. The Princess Beatrice will be patron of the London groups of the association. Her Royal Highness takes a zealous interest in the work of the society, founded by Lady Mary Fielding; she attends the committee regularly when in town, examines the report of cases in need of help, and grants pensions. Some important work has been done by the guild for various members of the Royal family, H.R.H. Princess Frederika being also one of its sympathising supporters. Lady Eden continues to superintend the art needlework department, which has acquired a just celebrity for its admirable church work, and its almost unrivalled skill in restoring old tapestries.

THE LADY MAYORESS had a brilliant reception (the first of the season), at the Mansion House, which has been thoroughly redecorated and vastly improved. Besides the usual reception there was some good music. Mrs. De Vre sang a French song, and "She wandered down the mountain side," with much feeling; and the winner of the De Kayser scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music (a pupil of Joachim) played the violin as it is not often played. There were three Parsee ladies in their native dresses. One wore cream, bordered with black and gold embroidery, which was carried gracefully over her head; another, a black head drapery magnificently embroidered in gold on a transparent foundation; while the third was arrayed in cloth of gold and silver. A large gathering of Parsee gentlemen were also present. The Lady Mayoress wore black silk, with a soft pink waistcoat, many fine diamonds, and carried a bouquet. There were several young ladies assisting her in entertaining.

THE CARNIVAL has been kept royally at Nice. The cortège opened with gendarmes, followed by firemen, and all the heterogeneous surroundings of King Carnival. There was a fête and masked ball at the casino. The Tribunes along the Promenade des Anglais were filled early. Bands of music were stationed at intervals. A special stand near the Méditerranée Club was reserved for the Emperors of Brazil. The carriages were well decorated. Mme. Jeanne Ray's was a mass of mimosas, relieved by blue and cream ribbons. Mme. d'Asinoff had a landau covered with anemones, heliotrope, mimosas, and pinks, the carriage lamps being replaced by bouquets. The Dauprat mail coach was covered with greenery and the American flag, with magnificent bouquets, at each corner; in the rear was a horn of plenty, from which flowers were falling. Colonel Freeman's car looked like a nest of green ferns on wheels, studded with thousands of flowers; at each corner were the American, English, and French flags.

A MONUMENT to the ill-fated Lady Flora Hastings has just been erected in the graveyard at Londoun, Ayrshire, near the vault of the Hastings family, in which she lies buried. The monument also commemorates the Marchioness of Hastings, Lady Flora's mother, who survived her only a short time, and whose coffin was placed beside her daughter's.

TWO of the Queen's carriages have been sent from the Royal Mews at Windsor Castle to Italy, for Her Majesty's use while at Florence. The vehicles bore large black labels, painted in white letters, with the direction "Sa Majesté la Reine de la Grande Bretagne, Villa Palmieri, Florence, Italie," and were conveyed by South-Western and South-Eastern railways to Folkestone. They were to be forwarded via Boulogne to Florence, whither Her Majesty proceeds on March 20.

IT is not yet publicly known whether the marriage of Prince Oscar and Mlle. Ebba Munch takes place at the Swedish Church, London, or at Bournemouth, but it is believed at the latter place.

STATISTICS.

THE new German Army Bill increases the strength of the army by 700,000 men, and the initial cost of putting the change into effect, not considering the subsequent annual expense, will be £14,000,000. For a poor country like Germany, this is simply a terrific sacrifice.

THE WHEAT CROP of last year was evidently a good one, for farmers' deliveries have been maintained at a consistently high figure ever since the end of September. The detailed estimate just published by the Privy Council shows a yield of 32 25 bushels per acre, or 5 38 bushels above the deficient yield of the preceding year, and about 8 25 bushels above an ordinary average yield. The distinguishing feature of the year, according to the Privy Council report, was extremely fine quality and good weight, resulting from a cold dry spring extending into May, followed by dry hot weather almost to the close of harvest. Wheat has been threshed in the counties of Dorset and Wilts, weighing 68 lbs. per bushel, and the average weight in some districts has reached 63 lbs. to 64 lbs. per bushel. One of the estimators, a miller in large business, has met with hundreds of samples weighing 66 lbs. to the bushel. The straw of all cereals was short, and wheat straw, according to the returns, realised in some neighbourhoods £3 to £4 per ton. The yield of wheat in some localities was as high as fifty to sixty bushels per acre, though on light chalks and gravels, which suffered from drought, it was inferior.

GEMS.

A MAN whose heart does not respond to a lot of doing good or giving happiness is no longer a man. He has passed the line of manhood and should be ranked among beasts.

A GOOD man is the best friend, and therefore is first to be chosen, longest to be retained, and, indeed, never to be parted with, unless he ceases to be that for which he was chosen.

IT seems to me, says an eminent writer, that the world is withering under routine. 'Tis the inevitable lot of humanity; but in old days it was a routine of great thoughts, and now it is a routine of little ones.

THOSE who have no ear for music must be very careful how they speak about the mysterious world of thrilling vibrations which are idle noises to them. And so the true saint can be entirely appreciated only by saintly natures.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CLEANING JEWELLERY.—A good powder for cleaning jewellery, silver watch cases, &c., is made by mixing about four parts of whitening with one of rouge, using with alcohol or water; this, it will be found, is easily brushed out of crevices, engravings, &c.

OMELET.—Allow one egg for each person (two eggs make a small omelet). Beat the eggs well till light, season with pepper and salt, and a spoonful of finely-chopped chives, or shallot, and parsley; put a little butter in a pan, and when it is melted and hot put it in the eggs, &c., and fry. When the underside is coloured, and the top is about the consistency of scrambled eggs, flip it out of the pan into a hot dish, fold it over and serve it at once.

GINGER BRANDY.—Crush well in a mortar some white ginger, and place it in a jar with either the best loaf sugar or sugar candy, and the thinly pared rind of lemon. To this add the brandy, and let it all steep together for about a week, according to the strength of ginger desired. Stir occasionally, and finally strain it off and bottle. The proportions are not quite half-ounce of ginger, three quarters of pound of sugar or sugar candy, and the peel of one lemon to each quart of best brandy.

MISCELLANEOUS.

INCREASE of fortune brings increase of cares. Riches and power, so much the aim of all men, are no more capable of giving worldly happiness than of giving health, strength, or beauty. On the contrary, they often become real misfortunes and the bitter sources of misery in various ways.

USEFUL HINTS.—A French savant notes the fact that one seeks in vain for fine complexions among fashionable folk. Where wealth has been hereditary, coarse, dry skin is transmitted and appears soon after infancy. The cause of this sallow and faded condition, which the aristocratic classes sadly lament, is easily perceived, and its statement here may afford, by contrast, comfort to some country girls, and perhaps a hint in season for others: "They sit up late and get up late, thus losing the health-giving morning air; they feed too richly; they dress too fashionably, being swathed in furs at two o'clock in the afternoon, and having next to no clothing on the upper part of the body at midnight. And yet experts tell us the skin, to remain pure and soft, must not be exposed to extremes of heat and cold, must not have its healthy perspiration checked by sudden draughts. The woman who would have a beautiful complexion must live plainly, avoid rich meats, too much game and highly-seasoned made dishes."

UNEXPECTED WITNESSES.—An Italian tax-collector employed as clerk a young man named Andrea Pellicioni, but after a whole year's service refused to pay him any wages. Pellicioni forthwith brought an action against his employer, demanding as his due a sum of three hundred lire. Brugnoli, however, produced a document subscribed by the young clerk, in which the latter engaged to serve him without any pay. Pellicioni granted that the signature at the bottom of the paper was his own, but declared that he had never before seen the contract which occupied the rest of the page. The quarrel came before a higher tribunal, and the paper in question was submitted to the examination of experts. These gentlemen pointed out that the signature at the foot of the paper, "Andrea Pellicioni," had been traversed and blotted by flies while the ink was still wet, whereas the rest of the writing was perfectly clear and untouched by flies. Their opinion was that Brugnoli had possessed himself of a sheet of paper upon which he found Pellicioni's signature, and had then written the pretended contract over it. The court accepted this view, and the tax-collector was condemned to three years' imprisonment, with hard labour.

ANTIQUITY OF TELEGRAPHY.—In a curious old work printed at Paris in 1622 there occurs a remarkable passage, of which the following is a translation: "We may also tell you of this great and wonderful secret, which a certain German has shown to King Henry, and who, by his industry and dexterity, is able to speak with those who are far away, and this by means of the magnet. He first rubs together two needle magnets, and then places them each separately upon two clock dials, around which are engraved the twenty-four letters of the alphabet. If, then, they wish to speak together, or make each other understand what they would desire, they move one hand around until it has pointed to the letters which are necessary to make the words and sentences that they would say; and as they turn one needle so also the distant needle turns, making always the same movement. The king seeing this wonderful secret forbade him to divulge it, fearing that this would be opened very dangerous communication between the armies of his enemies and their besieged towns. The notion that two magnetic needles by being rubbed together would afterwards move in sympathy finds a place in more than one book of marvels of the seventeenth century, but the above date is, we believe, the earliest to which it has yet been traced."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BERTY.—March 22, 1874, came on Sunday; March 28, 1893, on Saturday; July 10, 1870, on Sunday.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Not unless money has been paid during the twelvemonth for the child's support.

A NORFOLK GIRL.—The 26th February, 1857, fell on a Thursday, and the 17th May, 1867, on a Friday.

DORA.—It is proper for a gentleman to offer his arm to any lady whom he may be escorting at night, and also to give her the wall.

D. F. F.—Clara means bright, illustrious. Frances is the feminine of Francis, and means free; or, according to some authorities, fierce.

JANEY.—No. It is not proper for a lady to do anything during leap year which it would be improper for her to do at any other time.

G. H. W.—You are remarkably well developed in both bust and waist measure, but your hands and feet are very little above the average size.

CYMBRO.—1. The 11th February, 1864, fell on a Thursday; the 11th July in the same year on a Monday. 2. The name James means beguiling.

M. S. C.—You must give six months' notice, expiring at the date the tenant entered; thus, if the tenant entered at Christmas you must give notice in June.

LETTIE.—The sound of a in *cat* is between that of a in *at* and that of a in *far*. You can come near giving the correct sound by lengthening and broadening the sound of a in *at* just a little.

BROWN EYES.—1. The portrait is that of a tall, dark, slender young lady with bright eyes and an intelligent and rather determined expression. 2. Fair writing. 3. Try the dumb-bell exercise. 4. Decidedly small waisted.

C. S. S.—A lady who is not a good dancer will naturally feel very awkward in a ballroom or other place in which the torpescorean art is practised. She should first perfect herself in it, and then will have no trouble in getting a partner and acquitting herself with credit.

G. and B.—1. Both are children of men who belong to the professional world, and certainly the "artist's daughter" would not be lowering herself. Perhaps, she would not object to marry the son of a well-known bishop who for many years was a famous schoolmaster. 2. Gentlemen, we hope.

S. N. Y.—Instead of writing to the young lady, the young man should hunt up somebody who could give him an introduction to her. To write to her while they were yet strangers would be intrusive on his part; and if she should not answer his note, he would have reason to suppose that she was offended at his presumption, as she very likely would be.

ANNIE AND JAY.—You seem to be two foolish girls, and need the supervision of your mothers. You should give up all thought of the strange young men who (according to your own story) behaved in such an ungentlemanly way towards you, and pay strict attention to your studies. Your spelling, grammar and penmanship are very poor, and you should try to improve in respect to all of them as fast as you can.

KATIE.—1.—The initials named are those of the postal districts to which the letters are directed, e.g., E.C. stands for East Central, S.W. for South Western, W.C. for West Central, &c. 2. Quote the number on the letter, and write to the address given. 3. Yes. 4. Fair writing, and rather masculine. Practise from good copies. We are much obliged for your good opinion, and trust we shall always merit it.

A. V.—If you had any genuine regard for either of the gentlemen to whom you refer, you would not have any difficulty in making up your mind as to which of them you prefer. As the case now stands, you do not seem to care enough for either of them to induce you to give up the other one. Should you continue to encourage both the gentlemen, the probability is that you will not gain the lasting affection of either of them. You should decide for yourself which of them you prefer, and then treat him accordingly.

E. N. A.—To preserve fresh-cut flowers without changing their colour, dip them in melted paraffin, withdrawing them quickly. The liquid should be only hot enough to maintain its fluidity, and the flowers, freed from moisture, should be dipped one at a time, held by the stalks, and moved about for a minute or two to get rid of air-bubbles. Another method of preservation is to dip them carefully, as soon as gathered, in perfectly clean gum-arabic water, the gum forming a complete coating on the stems and petals, and preserving their shape and colour long after they have become dry. These are considered the simplest and best mode of preservation.

H. L. K.—Several explanations may be made for the gentleman's seeming neglect to recognise your kindness in presenting him with the muffer. Perhaps it was sent to him anonymously, or under an assumed name, on which account he is at a loss to know who was the donor. Then, again, professional duties or a natural absent-mindedness may have caused the errand to pass by without any recognition. We can hardly believe him to be one of that class who are so poorly bred as to forget their duty in the simplest matter of social courtesy. His professional training as a physician precludes the possibility of such being the case. Let the matter pass, and do not allow it to worry you in the least. Life is too short to be occupied in troubling over such trivial occurrences.

G. H.—If no provision has been made as to the subject, then the club will have to determine it by vote, whenever the question comes up. It would be advisable to have a bye-law on the subject, so as to avoid disputes about it.

C. D. Y.—Such a difference in age as your mention is not an insuperable barrier to domestic happiness. If you and your elderly lover are adapted to each other so far as your tastes and dispositions are concerned, you would have as fair a prospect for wedded bliss as though you were as old as he is.

C. C. H.—Among the richest men in America are Jay Gould, Cornelius and William K. Vanderbilt, John W. Mackay, and John Jacob Astor. Among the richest men in Europe are the Rothschilds, the Duke of Westminster, and the Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. Leopold of Belgium is very rich.

L. L. R.—The best course for you to pursue is to get a good school text-book of arithmetic and give all your leisure to the study of it. You can get a good book on the subject at any booksellers. A teacher cannot help you very much, as the matter can be studied and mastered without the aid of a teacher if you will apply yourself to it.

E. P. P.—We do not think that Edison's phonograph will do away with shorthand. Why not learn both telegraphing and shorthand? The first can be learned in six months by close application, and is a good thing to know. The second is more difficult of attainment and scarcely as good a trade. Our advice to you is to learn both. It is a hard thing to get a good living, and a young man should avail himself of every opportunity.

LOVE LEADS US ON.

Love leads us on, now here, now there;
Love leads us on, we know not where;
And though its influence we'd repel,
We can't escape the magic spell.

Love leads us out of dark abyss
To scenes of joy, to heights of bliss;
Where fragrant flowers bestrew the way,
Love leads us on from day to day.

Love leads us on to noble deeds,
To thought and care for other's needs,
And in each trial-hour imparts
Courage and strength to fainting hearts.

Through doubts and fears, through blinding mist,
Though we may oft of his course resist,
Our heart-strings held in his control,
Love leads us onward to the goal.

Love leads us on to be as bold
And brave as were the knights of old;
He leads us on, we know not where,
Till we are caught in Love's sweet snare.

'Tis Love that leads us to our fate,
And searches out our own true mate
And happier they than Queens or kings,
Whose hearts obey Love's leading strings.

J. P.

BRIGHTLY MAID.—1. A well-developed seventeen-year old girl should weigh about 100 pounds, and stand about five feet one or two inches in her stockings. 2. In choosing a husband, let personal beauty be a secondary consideration; true worth is of primary importance. Some persons claim that blondes should mate with brunettes, and vice versa; but it is foolish to imagine that this should be an inviolable rule. 3. A girl of seventeen years should select for a life partner one who is but two or three years her senior. Twelve years difference is, generally speaking, hardly compatible with happiness.

F. R. E.—1. The gentleman who has been corresponding with the unknown person—who, instead of being a female, may be one of the sterner sex—had better be sure of such identity before exposing himself to the ridicule that may follow his visit. 2. Your height and weight are both slightly above the average at twenty-two. 3. Wait until the girl has attained her eighteenth year, and then perhaps her mother will interpose no objection to your suit. If you love her as devotedly as claimed, the time (one year) will quickly pass away, and both parties will have gained greatly in common sense and worldly experience.

J. B.—The superstition concerning "divining rods" requires that the rod should be held in the hands of some one who has the "gift," as it is called, whereby is meant a person so endowed with the "divining" power as to be in world sympathy or communication with the invisible object sought to be discovered through the agency of the rod. It is supposed by the believers in the potency of such necromancy that the rod, held by a person having the "gift," will turn in his hands, or that one end of it will sink towards the earth, on his passing over any mine, spring of water, or other object sought for. The rod is usually a green twig, from three to four feet long. Some "professors" of the divining rod set great stress on the way in which it should be cut, the manner of holding it, &c., &c. Of course, all claims to elements of witchcraft or necromancy in this business are unfounded. If the "divining rod" ever does perform any of the functions claimed for it (and testified to in some cases by witnesses who seem to be entitled to credence), it is owing to some simple natural law not yet brought from the foggy domain of ignorance and superstition into the clear realms of philosophy and science.

C. K.—Your lady-love's praises may be sung in the following lines:

"A sweetness in the air when thou art near,
Due to thy beauty and thy wondrous grace,
Dawns on the senses and pervades the place,
In this all those who know thee well agree;
Even thy rivals join in praising thee!"

CISY.—A calendar month is a solar month, as set down in the almanacs. By the calendar arrangement the month of February has twenty-eight days, except in leap-year, when it has twenty-nine; April, June, and September and November have thirty days each, and all the other months have thirty-one days respectively. A lunar month is the period of one revolution of the moon, which, in a rough way, may be said to be four weeks.

FORGET-ME-NOT.—It may be that the gentleman sent his visiting card to the lady in advance of his arrival in the city, for the purpose of suggesting to her that he was coming. Her understanding of it would perhaps be correct if she supposed that he thus sent her his card in order to save himself the trouble of writing a letter. On meeting him it would be proper for her to treat him just the same as she would have done had he not sent her his card.

E. N. S.—The oath was finally modified so that a Jew could take it without doing violence to his religious conscience, and Baron Lionel Rothschild, the first "atheistic Jew" ever allowed to take his seat in the House of Commons, was sworn in on July 26th, 1858. Mr. Gladstone has been in public life for half a century, and parties in England have changed so often during that period that the eloquent old veteran has been on both sides of British politics.

PUSH IN THE CORNER.—If by saying that you "did not feel like doing nothing" you had meant that you were not willing to remain in a state of idleness, your expression would have been correct. But as you say that you did not mean that, but meant that you only wanted to work a little, your expression is incorrect. You should have said (what it seems you afterwards did say), "I do not feel like doing much of anything," or something equivalent to that.

S. D. T.—1. The treaty of peace which brought to an end the war of 1812, between Great Britain and the United States, was signed at Ghent, Belgium, on December 24, 1814, but it did not reach this country until February 11, 1815. Captain Warrington, commanding the U.S. vessel *Peacock*, fired the last shot of that conflict on June 30, 1815, when he captured the British vessel *Nautilus* in the Straits of Sunda. He did not know of the conclusion of peace until the next day, when he immediately gave up his prize. 2. President Lincoln's wife maiden name was Mary Todd.

F. F.—It is said that some centuries ago, during a battle between European troops and Tartars, a European officer called out to his commanding officer, "General, I have caught a Tartar!" "Bring him here," said the General. "The Tartar won't come," responded the officer. "Then come here yourself," the general said. "The Tartar won't let me!" the officer replied. The officer's prisoner turned out to be more his master than his captive, and hence originated the phrase about catching a Tartar. The meaning of it is that a person who imagined himself victorious suddenly finds out that the other party has got the best of him.

E. L. L.—You cannot compel the teacher to refund any of the money you paid for your lessons. You ought to have known that you could not possibly acquire "a perfect and stylish handwriting" in "six easy lessons." You should let your experience in this matter be a "lesson" to you. Should a man tell you that he would teach you to play the pianoforte in a perfect and stylish manner in six easy lessons, would you believe him? You possibly would, inasmuch as you parted with your money to the writing-master who agreed that under his tuition you should acquire "a perfect and stylish handwriting" in the same number of "easy lessons;" and you would have nearly as good reason for your faith in the one case as in the other. No art can be perfectly acquired in six easy lessons, nor in sixty, nor probably in six hundred. To acquire an elegant, stylish handwriting is the work of years. It can only be done by actually writing over acres of paper, after one has mastered the correct principles of penmanship. These principles may be learned in "six easy lessons," or even in a less number, when both teacher and pupil are unusually gifted, the one in imparting and the other in imbibing instruction; but it is quite another thing to put them in practice in a "perfect and stylish" manner.

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